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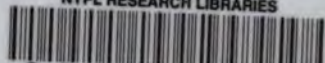
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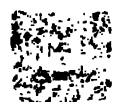


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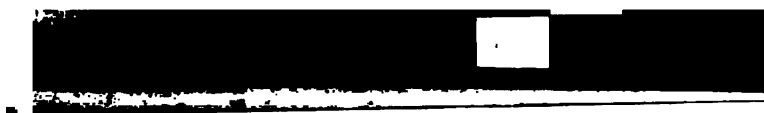
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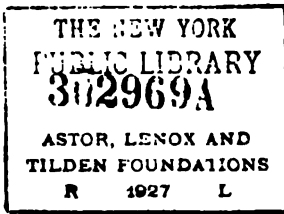
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## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I—I Start on My Vacation.....	1
II—Predicament .....	19
III—The Inquisition.....	32
IV—Beatrice.....	47
V—An Interloper.....	62
VI—I Speak Out.....	80
VII—Flight.....	94
VIII—A Chance Encounter.....	112
IX—The Best Man.....	127
X—The Garment of Betrayal.....	142
XI—The Bishop.....	156
XII—Entanglements .....	172
XIII—Artifice .....	187
XIV—Plot and Surprise.....	202
XV—On the Trail.....	215
XVI—Captive .....	228
XVII—A Corner in Clothes-line.....	240
XVIII—Love Among the Roses.....	252
XIX—The Voice of Authority.....	264
XX—Wanted: A Husband.....	281
XXI—Complications .....	293
XXII—General Dementia.....	308
XXIII—Boomerang.....	322





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# HEARTS ARE TRUMPS

## CHAPTER I

### I START ON MY VACATION

Through the lace curtains of a wide bay-window came a stream of fresh mountain air and beams of bright sunshine, while the chimes of a neighbouring church pealed joyously in the blue air, sending to my ears their mellow lin-lan-lone, their distant melody, which the breeze brought to me sometimes louder and sometimes fainter, as the wind rose or fell. There was a repetition of the rap on the door that had awakened me, followed by the announcement: "It's half past eight, sir. Breakfast at quarter past nine."

I arose, and after collecting my scattered senses and a few garments, looked out of the bay-window. The view was glorious, stretching across a

wide, deep valley to lofty hills beyond. The little church, nestling among the trees on the hither slope, must be the place whence the chimes had pealed. And even as I formed the thought, their voices, momentarily hushed, again resumed their insistent melody. The tune was, "Ancient of Days."

I rather wondered at their having such chimes in a small country place like Hilltown. The grounds about the inn, too, would have done credit to any millionaire's residence. They were the finest hotel grounds I had ever seen. The bells continued to call their message to the hill-tops, to the woodland, to the spirit of beauty everywhere, to whatever of joy and of reverence still lingered in the world of man. It was Sunday morning.

My inner man began to assert himself; not my soul, I regret to say, merely my appetite. This served to bring me down to the practical things of life. Feeling that the day called for the cleanest of fresh linen, I sought my suit-case. But the bag I produced from the closet wasn't mine at

all. It was a glossy, tan kit-bag of the latest Cross pattern. Mine had been a suit-case worn and travel-stained. Yet that blunder, serious though it was, was only part of the trouble. The silken tile the porter had stuck on my head lay before me. Instead of my outing-jacket I beheld the solemn frock-coat he had hustled onto my back.

But now I was awake, and as I breathed in the tonic qualities of the Berkshire air I was inclined to look at all things from a cheerful point of view. It couldn't be helped. So I opened the grip, which luckily was not locked, and drew out a rather clerical-looking collar. It was at least a size too large, and seemed intended to go on hind-side-to. I succeeded in getting it into place, however. The other man would have to do some choking, while I had plenty of breathing-space. Under the circumstances I decided to make my own shirt serve me until Monday, and undertook no further depredations among the stranger's linen.

It was not, then, all a dream; the clothes were

pretty tangible evidence of the reality of my experience. Gradually, as I sat down and tried to center my somewhat scattered faculties on the matter, the course of events of the preceding night came back to me.

A long course of overwork and social dissipation had left me, Basil Plympton, well nigh a nervous wreck. I had decided on an immediate and extensive vacation as my only hope of salvation. I dropped my work as dramatic and musical critic for the time being, so far as my connection with one of Gotham's leading newspapers was concerned, though I had in my grip the manuscript of a play that Carl Krull had entrusted to me for a reading. Krull was one of New York's leading theatre lessees and managers, and had a reputation for bringing out new actors and plays of first-class caliber. I was one of five men to whose judgment he submitted every new play, and he never put one on without our united approval. He was a thrifty, cautious German, was Carl, and well deserved the success he had achieved.

I START ON MY VACATION 5

"Have you looked over 'Diamonds Lead, but Hearts are Trumps?' " he wrote. "The other four all say it is a 'corker', and I am only waiting to hear from you. Come to Hilltown for that vacation you spoke of taking and bring the manuscript with you. I must decide the matter at once, if I am to produce the play this fall."

I had been so pressed with work for the two weeks before starting on my outing that I had had no time to look over the play. I was to see Carl in the morning, and it would not do to have to confess that I had not even glanced at the manuscript. I had barely time to run it through hastily before putting it into my grip on leaving for the train. The handwriting, I noticed, was feminine and bespoke a cultivated mind and an artistic temperament. The plot was clever and original, but its general lay-out indicated a woman's view of things. It was a keen view, though, and a cheerful one. Whatever my final verdict might be as to the intrinsic merit of the composition, I made up my mind at once that the writer was a charming girl and one whom I

would like to meet. Even harried and fagged as I was I could not help laughing over one or two of the situations.

As far as I could see, the other readers were probably right. My off-hand judgment agreed with theirs, that the new play was a "find."

No name was attached to it, but I was convinced that it was a first venture. In spite of its extreme cleverness, it bore some earmarks of the amateur, though it had evidently been read over and corrected by a man with wide experience on the stage. It was marked by many interlineations and corrections in a masculine hand.

Even the slight mental exertion of arousing myself to this light task exhausted me completely. It was nearly time for me to leave for my train, and I was tired out. That I could appreciate any dramatic work while in such a condition was a high tribute to his intrinsic merits.

As I staggered aboard the train, five minutes before midnight, I had another bad attack of faintness. The porter was just making up the

last two berths, five and seven. I saw him hanging up a frock coat and silk hat belonging to lower seven. Five happened to be mine, and seven some one else's.

Having nothing else to do, I went into the smoking compartment. Among its occupants was a fleshy young man of clerical aspect, who was sitting in an alpaca coat, chatting sociably with a fellow passenger. Dropping into a vacant seat, I picked up a newspaper and commenced to read. The only item that attracted any especial attention from me was one relating to the Apthorpes. The Apthorpes were a proud and wealthy family who had dug up a set of ancestors. Buried ancestors are easier to locate than buried treasure, otherwise we should all be digging for the latter. They were pillars of the Episcopal church, and extremely good and proper people. Jim Apthorpe belonged to the group of pious millionaires who rob the poor to give unto the Lord, making no change in the financial status of either, but serving to lay up treasures in heaven and to keep the long green in circulation.



With all their wealth, with all their ancestors, and with all their piety, a rather unusual thing had occurred within the circle of that exclusive family. Miss Beatrice Apthorpe, the only unmarried daughter, and with her sister, Mrs. Gosse, the heir presumptive to several millions, had just announced her engagement to Harry Fielding, the popular actor, who had created something of a furore among matinée girls during the season just closed. Naturally there was all sorts of talk about a match which had given the four hundred a fit of nervous prostration. All things considered, it was indeed a strange alliance.

In her own set Miss Beatrice Apthorpe had the reputation of being clever and accomplished, and though not much over twenty was considered to be unusually mature and a girl of refined nature.

Fielding was reported to be a handsome, fascinating fellow of vast assurance and low origin. I had seen him act, but we had not met. Even if the young lady had taken a romantic fancy to

him, it seemed strange that her proud and aristocratic relatives should countenance such a match. Yet (and it was the most peculiar circumstance of all) the girl's family encouraged the alliance, so report declared. Gossip had it, in fact, that it was the parents who were hastening the culmination. This seemed highly improbable, yet the city editor of my own paper had it on good authority.

The pair were to be married at once and sail immediately after for Europe. A report of the wedding was a thing to be desired by all newspapers, but it was scarcely likely that any of them would obtain one, at least first-hand. The wedding was to be private, only immediate members of the families being present. It was to take place at Burgmoor, the summer residence of the Apthorpes, which was at Greenford, a station on the same line as Hilltown, my destination, and about twenty miles south of it. The fact that the scene of this social comedy was in the vicinity of my own destination was what enlisted my somewhat listless interest. All newspaper correspon-

dents had been warned to keep away, Apthorpe having refused all requests from the various papers to send representatives. Some of this I gathered from the article before me; the rest I had read before.

I was very sleepy and soon went to my berth. The porter had finished his task and disappeared. In my comatose condition I must have tumbled into lower seven, instead of lower five. When I had been asleep for what seemed like five minutes, I was roused to semi-consciousness by some one shaking me violently by the shoulder. A gentleman with a suave voice and clerical smile was trying to wake me up and explain things. But I did not want to be disturbed and told him so. I also, if I remember rightly, made some pointed and pertinent reference to the tropical regions. I told him I was in my own berth and wanted to sleep, and that it would be better for him to seek the right place now even if he persisted in going to the wrong one hereafter. He was in no mood to discuss his soul's ultimate destination, and must have taken my advice and occupied

the other berth, for he disturbed me no more. So much for being good-natured; it doesn't pay, in the long run. Of course I was very sleepy, or I should have been less rude.

The porter aroused me a few minutes afterward it seemed, though it was five hours later, in point of fact. While I was still dazed and more than half asleep he helped me on with my clothes, clapped a hat on my head, stuck a grip into my hand, and bundled me off the train which drew away from the little station as my feet touched the platform, having barely come to a full stop.

Had I been fully awake I would scarcely have permitted myself to be handed into the waiting carriage and driven without explanation to my destination. But as I felt then I didn't care what became of me as long as I could sleep, and it must be borne in mind that I was, for all practical purposes, performing accustomed motions from force of habit rather than of my own volition. I again partly awoke as we lurched into a driveway, under a rustic arch. I glanced

back at the gate, over which was a rustic sign, lettered in wooden filigree work. It read:

ROOM GRUB

No, there was no mistake about that ridiculous sign. That is what it said. It does still!

I merely followed the man who took my grip up a broad stairway, and into a sumptuous apartment whose snowy bed looked very inviting. Five minutes later I was sound asleep.

The hat, the coat and the bag doubtless all belonged to the clergyman who had good-naturedly allowed me to remain in his berth while he took mine, when he saw how tired and sleepy I was. It seemed clear that I had been put off at his destination while he had probably been carried on to mine. I could not repress a chuckle at the vision of the reverend young gentleman wearing my jaunty hat and outing jacket. All in all, I had much the best of the bargain and should be thankful.

Where was I? As I stood before the mirror,

adjusting my cravat, my eyes lighted on the photograph of a young woman on the bureau before me. Assuredly she was no inn-keeper's daughter; that fact was patent to me at the first glance. It was a face to be remembered, one to dream about. It was original, moody, joyous and pure. The features were necessarily a little irregular to express all that. The right eyebrow was highly arched and the other almost straight. The left corner of the mouth had a droll droop and the right a slight smile. The eyes looked at you from under a veil of remarkably long lashes, and the retroussé nose seemed to have just scented mischief. She was fashionably dressed, yet there was something even in the drapery of her flowing sleeves that indicated originality.

It was not at all probable that the photograph of such a girl would be found in the bedroom of a country hotel, nor were the dainty water-colors that adorned the walls, the vase of fresh roses on the stand, the Swiss clock on the mantel, and the various other appointments that bespoke both taste and wealth, at all likely to be furnished by

a public hostelry. These things made me think that the destination of the young clergyman must have been a private dwelling, and some residence of the refined and well-to-do as well. This explained also the extensive and picturesque grounds and the fine chimes. Wealth can compass almost anything of a material sort. The fact gradually percolated through the somewhat dense strata of my overworked mentality that I had not only appropriated the young clergyman's grip, coat and hat, but that I had been seized upon by the servants of some wealthy family as an expected guest. I had been given a drive intended for the minister; I had been shown to a room prepared for him, and I had occupied the couch spread for his repose. The unsuspecting family below stairs were without doubt at this moment waiting to donate me his breakfast. Doubtless Carl Krull was waiting for me also; he would have to wait.

How was I to extricate myself from this predicament? I went to the window with the wild notion of jumping out and making a run for it.

There were difficulties. If I jumped out it was not at all likely that I would be able to run until after I had been taken to the hospital and treated. Besides, while in my own clothes I might have chanced the latter part of it, were I able to run after alighting, in the parson's costume it would have been highly undignified. I wasn't arrayed for the part of a runaway thief, and I ought to have a proper respect for the cloth, especially when it was borrowed cloth. Frock coat and silk hat would be an unseemly sight if seen streaking across a broad lawn at a quarter to nine in the morning. A couple of hours after they might think me late to church; but something would have to be done long before that. Yet coatless and hatless I would be a marked man and quite likely to be held up and asked to explain myself before I reached the gate.

There were people astir in the hall and parlors below; any hope of my getting away unobserved was chimerical. And the sounds I heard did not seem to be the voices of servants; members of the household were about. This was made plain by



a laugh, a girl's laugh, a mirthful, tinkling, silver-toned runlet of musical notes, sweeter than the notes of the chimes and more joyous. Of course the laugh belonged to the photograph; of that there could be no question. If the miniature mouth were quickened into life it would make just that sort of music in its mirthful moments.

But I was growing desperate. If I did not make a break and get away soon, the breakfast would be announced, and I would be proclaimed an interloper or a thief, and even the probable murderer of the young clergyman whose wardrobe I had seemingly purloined. Of course I could walk boldly down-stairs and confess the whole thing as it had actually occurred, but who would believe such an improbable tale? Besides, all the details of my strange misadventures were not clear even in my own mind, so sleepy and overwrought had I been at the time of their occurrence. It might easily happen that I would get tangled up in my recital and contradict myself. Yet, unless I could devise some other means of escape, what else was there for me to do

but to come out with my absurd story and lame apologies?

I took one last, despairing look out of the window before putting myself in the hands of fate. I was in a front room that overlooked the driveway as well as the valley and church from the bay-window on the side. I now saw that absurd rustic sign over the gate, which had attracted my sleepy eyes as I had looked back upon it in driving in:

ROOM GRUB

So it seemed to announce to the public in hospitable vernacular. In one respect, at least, I had made no mistake. What in the world did any one mean by sticking up a sign like that at the entrance to private grounds?

"Let me see," I muttered, "how can that sign be explained in keeping with everything else about me? Now that I was wide awake it was easy enough. There was something queer about those letters. They had been turned inside-out, hindside-foremost, or wrongside-to, or something,

by the country bumpkin who did the carpenter work. To my waking vision the letters did not exactly read ROOM GRUB. They looked more like this:

**BURGMOR**

Of course the letters faced the street and were intended to be read from the street! From that side the sign wouldn't spell ROOMGRUB, or anything like it. It spelled:

**BURGMOR**

I remembered the newspaper story I had been reading on the train the night before, and the truth came over me in a flash. I was an uninvited guest at the summer residence of the Apthorpe family!

## CHAPTER II

### PREDICAMENT

If I presented myself to the Apthorpes with no better or more convincing excuses than those afforded by the actual facts of the case, I might pass the rest of the day in jail and the remainder of my life in ridicule. I couldn't go to them and say: "I am Basil Plympton of the New York 'Express.' My paper is anxious to get a representative inside your house, but I am here by mistake. A variety of curious circumstances conspired to put me in the place of another man. All I want is to go away and seek for the minister whom I have robbed quite inadvertently. Kindly allow me to depart in peace." Does any one suppose for a moment that they would let me go without calling for the police?

As the truth was unbelievable, a story must of necessity be invented. My imagination is of

the capable and vivid character required in the newspaper profession, but there must be some basis of fact upon which to weave a fabric of romance. As it would not do to tell who I actually was or how I really came there, I must personate some one else and provide an explanation of my presence more plausible than the truth. The logical starting-point was the personality of the young clergyman whom they expected as a guest. When I found out who he was I might invent some excuse for his absence and put myself forward as one delegated by him to come in his stead.

I turned to his kit-bag as furnishing a probable clue, and dumped its contents upon the bed. The result was disappointing. Collars, shirts, underwear and the manuscript of a sermon lay there in a heap; nothing else.

"Men who travel in a sleeping car untagged ought to be compelled to pay double fare!" I ejaculated.

I glanced over the sermon hoping to find his name attached to it somewhere. It was full of

peace and good-will to man, with frequent references to mountain flowers and purity as of snow. I was in no mood to be edified and thrust it back contemptuously into the dominie's grip, wrapped up in undergarments. Had I realized what a useful asset that sermon was to prove, I should have treated it with more respect.

I was up a tree once more, and from force of habit sought to thrust my hands into the pockets of my jacket. They slid down the sides of the minister's frock-coat without finding any resting-place. Of course the pockets were in the tail of the coat and of course the coat-tail pockets were the receptacle of all the young parson's more valuable worldly possessions. The object I drew forth was a purse!

It was a sleek purse and one well lined with bills of sizable denominations. I counted them. One hundred and fifty dollars was the figure. It was a clear case of grand larceny. Were my troubles never to stop accumulating? Burglary and larceny make a good start, anyhow. My vacation had begun under promising auspices.

The money was a grievous cross, to express it clerically, but the purse contained information which the valise omitted to furnish, namely several cards, inscribed as follows:

REV. CHARLES W. TUPPER

ST. LUKE'S RECTORY

*West End Ave.  
and Eighty-first St.*

Now that I knew the name of the man whom the Apthorpes supposed to be their guest, the prospects were a little more hopeful. To personate his substitute for a short time ought not to be difficult save for the fact that such a substitute must, of necessity, also be a clergyman. I could say that Tupper had been suddenly taken ill, that his grandmother was dead, that his rector was off on a hunting-trip and could not spare him—any one of a dozen excuses. Then I could take a stroll before breakfast and disappear.

Yes, I would disappear in a hurry. The vanishing lady in the circus wouldn't be a circumstance to me when it came to that part of the act!

But I would not go empty-handed. A man likely to be accused of all the crimes that were piling up against me had no cause to hesitate over a little thing like appropriating a young woman's photograph, especially when he happened to be infatuated with it.

So I took the picture of Miss Beatrice Apthorpe, for it could be no other than she, from its place on the bureau and concealed it against my palpitating heart.

Would I pass for a clergyman, even for a few minutes? That was the vital question. I looked at my reflection in the mirror, but the result was not reassuring. My clothing did not have that ample mantle of charity which covereth all sins. My hat was proper, though I had let it roll on the floor and misused it shamefully. It had to be rubbed briskly with a towel to restore its sheen. My frock-coat was unimpeachable, my collar



duly clerical; so far, good. There, however, the appropriate ended, and the deficiencies began to glare by contrast.

My vest was decidedly off-color, but that didn't show when the coat was tightly buttoned, so it did not count. I<sup>4</sup> had no gloves, and my hands were long and lean. My necktie was red; it should have been either white or black. My shirt was striped with pink when it should have been pure white. I had no time now to undress again and try on one of the parson's. My cuffs also had lines of pink in them to match the shirt. My shoes should have been high patent-leathers. They were low tans with bright red stockings peeping over the tops. All these sins of omission and commission were sufficiently incongruous, but they sank into insignificance and merely served to form a bizarre background to the utterly damning iniquity of my trousers!

I had been beguiled into purchasing those glaring white and brown checks through the blandishments of a plausible tailor who had them in stock and recognized me for an easy mark. They were

all the rage in London and freshly imported, he assured me. Well, they may have been all right for London, and might pass in New York, but they would scarcely do for a parson, even when on an outing.

Yes, I was pretty sporty for a clergyman, but such I must be for a brief season; and as my trousers were from London, I considered it wise to turn the rest of me into an imported article. I would be an Englishman. That would not only explain to some extent my eccentric attire; it would also free me from the responsibility of accounting for a host of American friends and relatives in my assumed character. Ah, yes, I would be English, very English! I took for my model a young fellow from the London "Times" who had tried his luck on the "Express" in order to learn the methods of American journalism. He stood it for about a week and then returned to his native land in disgust. I stood before the mirror for a dress-rehearsal, and tried to practise the "broad a" as I had heard him use it. Just then a gong sounded. The Swiss clock on the

mantle struck quarter past nine. My hour had come!

I buttoned the clergyman's coat tightly over my palpitating heart and my iniquitous vest, and opened the door of the bedroom. With a dignified and pompous stride I descended the broad stairway into the spacious hall. Then events followed in quick succession. From that moment onward I was in the hands of fate and tossed hither and thither on the seas of chance.

A fine, erect gentleman, of fifty or upwards, with silver hair and mustache, and a face in which pride was blended with refinement, met me at the foot of the stairs. "Good morning, Mr. Tupper, welcome to Burgmoor," he said, extending his hand.

Before I had time to explain that I wasn't the Rev. Charles W. Tupper, of St. Luke's rectory, but his friend and substitute, the Rev. Hogarth Applethwaite, of Hallam Manor, Devonshire, a stately lady, arrayed in rustling black silks, came forward and seized my other hand with: "Charmed to have you with us, Mr. Tupper."

A curly-headed little boy of eight or nine walked after her with his finger in his mouth, and gazed upon me with reverent awe.

Then followed all the rest of the family. These were Mrs. John W. Gosse, née Miss Apthorpe, and mother of the young hopeful with the succulent fist; Mr. John W. Gosse, of Blessom & Gosse, bankers and brokers, 20 Broad Street, New York City; and Miss Beatrice Apthorpe, the young lady of the whimsical face and musical laugh, the bewitching damsel of the photograph.

They welcomed me, one and all, as Mr. Tupper. There was no chance for that contemplated stroll before breakfast, and the vanishing act I had planned to execute. I had delayed so long rehearsing the part of the ultra-English clergyman that breakfast was already on the table when I came down. The worst of it was that no one seemed to have any suspicion that I wasn't Tupper. Every one in the family so addressed me in turn. Apparently none of them knew their guest by sight. I had stepped into his shoes and they fitted exactly.

I hadn't figured on this at all. I was all screwed up to the part of the Rev. Hogarth Applethwaite, of Hallam Manor, Devonshire. To be obliged to fall back upon plain, unaccented Charles Tupper, of St. Luke's rectory, was a bit of a come-down.

Moreover, it defied all the laws of the drama. It was just as though Henry Irving entered "right center" as King Lear, to discover the stage all set for the balcony scene in "Romeo and Juliet." In that event the curtain would be rung down and the scenes shifted. Nothing of the sort was possible in my case. I had to play the part assigned me.

The Rev. Hogarth Applethwaite was never to appear on any stage. His "broad a" and his pompous stride must go with him. The trouble was, his red necktie, his striped shirt, his low tan shoes, his bright red stockings and his impossible trousers remained.

We all sat down to the breakfast-table. I had to do it; there was no other course possible. Then followed an ominous pause. What was the

matter? The servants stood about us motionless. I looked around to perceive that all present were stiff and queer. Mrs. Gosse gazed heavenward; Mr. Gosse examined his plate with absorbing interest; Master Gosse stopped staring at me long enough to stare at each of the others in turn. Mrs. Apthorpe smiled upon me benignly, but with a far-off gaze, as though I were floating somewhere in the realms of space, as indeed I wished I were. Miss Beatrice Apthorpe looked out of the window.

Then Mr. Apthorpe shaded his eyes with two fingers and said: "Mr. Tupper?"

The awful truth dawned upon me at last. They were waiting for me to say grace! I bowed my head, but not with reverence. I am glad to confess I had the grace to be ashamed. But that was the only kind of grace vouchsafed me. My face I knew to be the color of boiled lobster.

"Mamma, he's cryin'," I heard Master Gosse whisper to Mrs. Gosse.

In vain I strove to rise to the occasion and think of some simple form of prayer. "Now I

lay me down to sleep," would not do at that early hour in the morning. Besides, I had done enough in that line to last for one while. "Twinkle, twinkle, little star," was open to the same objection. "Little drops of water" were falling, but I was averse to advertising them.

After an awful two minutes of oppressive silence, Mrs. Gosse removed her eyes from the ceiling. Miss Beatrice lost her interest in the distant landscape. Mr. Apthorpe removed his eye-shade and Master Gosse observed with gravity: "Mamma, God's had his breakfast and I want mine."

"A silent grace is always so much more impressive than any spoken words," said Mrs. Apthorpe to me. "I was much moved, Mr. Tupper, by the devotional atmosphere which seems to surround you. I know some sweetly solemn thought possessed you, for you made me feel it."

I caught the eye of Miss Beatrice. How shall I ever describe the roguish commiseration of that glance?

Then followed the clatter of knives and forks

and the bustle of servants, the odor of steak and baked potatoes and the aroma of coffee. As I fortified the inner man I began to take a more cheerful view of the situation. If I could only last for half an hour or so I could easily get away.

"Mr. Tupper," demanded Master Howard Gosse, "can God make a five-year-old dog in five minutes?"

"Hush, Howard," said his mother.





## CHAPTER III

### THE INQUISITION

I shall never forget that breakfast for a number of reasons. I ate it in the odor of sanctity, with my sinful trousers under the table. It was a good breakfast, well cooked, well seasoned and well served; and I fell upon it with the proverbial appetite of my new calling. I felt like a parson and I ate like one. Barring the slight indiscretion of a red necktie and a striped shirt, which didn't show much, the upper part of me was dressed like one. If I could fetch up at the end of the race with the nether portions of my anatomy still concealed as securely from view, the Rev. Charles W. Tupper himself could not complain of my appearance or demeanour.

The windows were wide open and the air that flooded the room was fresh and invigorating. Even though I was in a predicament, I began to enjoy the full benefits of my vacation. It

wasn't so bad, they all treated me with such deference. They hung upon my opinions as though I were Moses with a fresh tablet of commandments. "A minister's couch is surely strewn with roses," I thought.

Then there came a bolt from out the blue that brought me up with a round turn.

"Do tell us, Mr. Tupper, what your text is to be," said Miss Beatrice Apthorpe, her arched eyebrow raising itself and the droll corner of her mouth twitching almost imperceptibly.

"My text?" I asked, fairly puzzled.

"Yes, the text of the sermon, you know; or do you preach without one, after the new fashion?"

"The sermon?" I gasped.

"Of course, what else? Didn't you know you were to preach this morning?"

I didn't. The possibility that a church service and a sermon were on the program prepared for the Rev. Charles W. Tupper had never entered my unclerical head. It was a case of vacating in short order or the last state of that man would be worse than the first.

"All Greenford is anticipating a real sermon," continued the girl, with intense mischief in her eyes. "The people here have to get along with a lay-reader nine months in the year, you know. Now Burgmoor has been built, papa will change all that."

"Do not be alarmed, there is plenty of time," said Mrs. Apthorpe soothingly, as I looked at my watch to conceal my dismay. "The country people have so far to come we do not begin service until quarter past eleven."

I recovered my self-possession. It was only half past nine. It would be very hard luck if I could not find some way out of the trap before church time. Meanwhile there was no use worrying. If worst came to worst there was a sermon all ready in the parson's grip up-stairs. I very much feared the good people of Greenford would have to make their lay-reader read his lays one more Sunday, despite the laudable efforts of the Apthorpe family to supply the pulpit.

"But can't you tell what the sermon will be about," persisted Miss Apthorpe, bound to worry

me all she could. What was she up to, anyway? Did she know I wasn't Tupper? It looked like it. Did she know who I, in fact, was? That was not so probable. If she did, then surely there were breakers ahead. Owing to my connection with a New York newspaper I would be suspected of invading Burgmoor for journalistic purposes.

"It will be very simple," I smiled. "I believe in the old-fashioned gospel discourse. No timely topics from the pulpit, if you please." The sentiment was conservative and served to head off the young lady's curiosity, but it burned a lot of bridges behind me at the same time.

Master Howard Gosse, whose mother had restrained him up to this point, now broke loose and began to catechise.

"Is God everywhere, Mr. Tupper?" he asked solemnly.

"Yes, my lad." I beamed graciously.

"Is he out in the kitchen with the cook?"

"Surely. He is the greatest democrat of all."

"And under the table?"

I drew in my legs convulsively, but replied with due dignity: "Everywhere, my boy, means in all places at once."

"Then is God in heaven?"

"Certainly, with all his little cherubs and angels."

"And in hell with all the little demons and devils?"

I was stumped, as I deserved to be, and remained discreetly silent. Master Howard knew he had me foul and expected no reply.

"Hush, Howard," said his mother.

"He will learn. He is a bright child, Mrs. Gosse," I said. It was tempting providence; Master Howard was encouraged to come at me again.

"Mr. Tupper," he said, "a bad dog bit my leg last week. Where will he go when he dies?"

"Dogs have no souls, my child. He won't go anywhere. He will just die."

"But when a bad man dies he goes to hell and is burned in eternal torments. Couldn't God

send that bad doggie there, too?" persisted the young theologian.

I saw some terrible clincher was coming again, so I waived the child aside with: "I'll tell you all about these things in the sermon, my lad."

But that didn't satisfy him a bit. As soon as a pause in the general conversation gave him another chance he was up and at me again with: "Say, Mr. Tupper, if a cow eats grass will she give milk?"

I was learning that it was unsafe to give unqualified assent to the most obvious proposition, when dealing with this youngster, so I replied guardedly, "I have been told so."

"If I eat grass will I give milk like a cow?"

"Probably not," I ventured, with great caution. It seemed a perfectly safe assertion.

"Why won't I?" he demanded.

I couldn't tell and so was floored again.

The family all laughed and I joined in the mirth, but preserved a due solemnity the while. I couldn't treat them to a good round guffaw. The privileges of the clergy have their limita-

"Beatrice, Mr. Fielding will be here at the six o'clock train. Don't you want to go and meet him?" asked her father.

"I—I would rather be excused, papa," said the girl, blushing and then turning away.

"As you probably know, Mr. Tupper has just married Mr. Apthorpe, "Mr. Fielding's daughter's fiancé. As you are also about to be married very quietly here and will be in Europe this week."

"I have heard something of it," I replied.

"We had thought of requesting your presence," he continued.

"I shall be most pleased," I asserted, "if you require my services?"

"Beatrice has decided upon to-morrow."

sion. Could it be possible—were they filled with tears? Had I caught a look of utter despair in her face, or was it merely my vivid imagination and my tendency to find the sensational lurking amid the commonplace things of life? I might be mistaken about it, but she did not look to me like a happy bride.

A pause of general embarrassment followed Apthorpe's reference to his daughter's approaching marriage. It had evidently thrown a wet blanket upon the whole company. Why? Clearly there was some mystery here.

Weddings are in some respects sad affairs. Old ties are broken and new ones formed, and the parents are apt to feel lonely and desolate. Nevertheless a happy bride does not usually hail the thought of her future husband's coming with tears, or shrink from meeting him at the depot. Nor do society girls ordinarily select such a secluded retreat for their nuptials and omit all the customary festivities from mere caprice.

Mystery or no mystery, however, I was in no position to probe it at present. Just then I had



all I could do, or a little more, to attend to my own affairs without prying into those of others.

Evidently partaking of the embarrassment, Apthorpe sought to create a diversion by asking me how the bishop was.

"Kindly and genial as ever, but growing a little childish," I said.

"Childish? He never struck me so. He is only fifty-five."

Why couldn't I have left off that touch! I thought all bishops were aged. "His heart is as young and his goodness as simple as a child's," I explained. It was a silly crawl, but it was the best I could do and had to go.

"What are the trustees of St. Luke's finally going to do about the Brownlee bequest, after all the fuss?" asked Mr. Gosse.

This was a poser, but I had to keep the ball rolling, so I made a lucky guess: "Keep it, of course."

"Then you do not disapprove of tainted money?"

"All money is more or less tainted," I replied, "but the chief trouble with it is, 'tain't mine and 'tain't yours."

I was sorry the moment I let that speech slip. It was right off the roof-garden, and smelled of beer and sausages. They all laughed, however, though they probably had all heard it half a dozen times, for they were all New Yorkers. I had yet to learn that any joke is new, any joke is sanctified, so long as a minister stands sponsor for it.

But though I had done fairly well so far the ice was very thin, and I might take a cold plunge at any moment.

"We have so many mutual acquaintances it is strange we have never met before," observed Mr. Gosse.

"It is rather strange," I assented.

"Not so peculiar when you remember that Mr. Tupper always lived near Boston and was only recently transferred to Bishop Porter's diocese," said Mrs. Apthorpe. "I noticed your New England 'broad a,' Mr. Tupper, when you first came

down, but you dropped it as soon as you began to feel at home."

So the Rev. Hogarth Applethwaite had stood me in good stead, after all! Having crawled through so far I began to feel easy once more; but now I received another shock that sent a cold chill down my spine.

"But you forget, my dear brother-in-law," announced Miss Beatrice Apthorpe, "that Mr. Tupper and I met frequently at Bath Beach last summer!"

I started, and upset a cup of coffee. The servants bustled about with fresh napkins and cleaned up the mess. Under cover of the confusion I regained my composure somewhat. I had thought she rather suspected me of being in the wrong pew. But suspicion is one thing, absolute knowledge quite another. What story could I tell her? There was no time now for elaborate and ornate invention, and I left it to the inspiration of the moment. I was sure she wouldn't swallow that Englishman, however. I wished now that I had stuck to those "broad a's."

"I have read your poems in the 'Churchman'; they are full of graceful metaphor," said Mrs. Gosse.

"What are they about?" asked her husband.

I made another three-bagger, as the sermon in the grip upstairs flashed upon my memory. "'Beautiful Snow' and 'Mountain Daisies' are my latest efforts," I said.

"I have read them both!" cried Mrs. Gosse.

Miss Apthorpe bestowed upon me a glance of bewildered admiration. I had almost shaken her faith in the evidence of her own senses by that last hit. I could see that she was half wondering if I wasn't Tupper, after all, or his twin brother, perhaps. But my triumph was short-lived. In another moment I was on thin ice once more.

"By the way, ah—the Rev.— Oh, bother, what *is* the name of your rector?" asked Apthorpe.

A false reply meant instant exposure. I did not know the true one, and it was no use saying he was dead. While I was hesitating I could see that Miss Apthorpe was watching me closely,

and I made bold to give her a look of supplicating appeal.

"Why, papa, you do not mean to say you have forgotten the Rev. Dr. Beacham?"

She had saved me! What was her game? She had lent a hand in keeping me dancing on a hot griddle until I was nearly done brown; but now that there was danger of my jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire she had deftly interfered to save the day.

The grilling went on for some minutes longer; but I had stopped worrying. Whenever I was in the least doubt I would hesitate and glance at Beatrice Apthorpe. She would at once respond with the necessary prompting, displaying the while a plausibility, resource and ready wit I could not but admire. Moreover, she seemed to take a keen enjoyment in assisting me to carry on the imposture. Several times when I might have blundered through, unassisted, I made no effort, but left the laboring oar to her while I studied her moves.

She had the game right in her hands. The

others made no difference now, but she was a riddle I would have to solve unless I could make good my escape within the next half-hour. She was a bright one, a deep one, and her eyes shone with mischief. What sort of mischief? That was the problem.

She was capable of leading me on into the worst sort of a mess from pure high spirits. But there was more to it than that. Some hidden purpose had clearly actuated her from the very first.

Why had she addressed me as Mr. Tupper instead of exposing me the moment I came down to breakfast? Why, in the name of common-sense, had she not given me a chance to explain things; make a fool of myself, to be sure, but still a much decenter sort of a fool than the rank impostor I had now become?

This girl's character was evidently as individual as her face, and the mystery of her engagement to the actor and her aversion to the impending marriage lent spice to the problem. I must get out and get out soon; that was the best and safest solution. If I could only see half a chance

CHAPTER XXV

an excuse about being obliged to look  
rmon, and retreated to my room.



## CHAPTER IV

### BEATRICE

Save for the mysterious clemency of Beatrice Apthorpe I would now be exposed, and perhaps in the hands of the law. This was the thought that forced itself upon me as I reëntered my room, no nearer escape from my embarrassing situation than when I left it.

To be sure, I had learned a few facts which would be very useful in an article for the "Express," and was on the track of a mystery which could be probed from a safe distance with fair promise of result. Had I planned the whole thing I could not have been more successful from a newspaper point of view. I knew the hour of the proposed marriage and some of the significant facts concerning its mysterious privacy. The rest I hoped to be able to ascertain. I had material for a full description of the summer



palace and its surrounding gardens. I had a picture of the bride. It was all exclusive stuff, too—a clean scoop on every other paper in New York City. While I was now a dramatic and musical critic, and had dropped out of all other lines of work, I was of course alert to the possibilities of such a story for my paper. I had landed scoops before, and I could turn the trick again.

As the thought of what would happen to me if I was caught began to loom large before my mind's eye, I felt in the tail pocket of the clergyman's coat for a handkerchief wherewith to mop my perspiring brow and polish up my wits.

In place of that useful and necessary article I drew forth a letter, which in my haste I must have overlooked before, when I purloined the dominie's purse. It was addressed:

*Rev. Charles W. Tupper,  
St. Luke's Rectory,  
West End Ave. and 81st St.,  
New York City.*

The hand was feminine; moreover, I recognized it at a glance. It was from the unknown authoress of the play!

Yes, I held in my hands a note to the young clergyman written by the girl who had conceived and executed that charming comedy, "Diamonds Lead, but Hearts are Trumps," which the ablest manager and the most competent critics of the metropolis pronounced a success beforehand.

How did the young minister come to know such a woman? Who was she? My curiosity in this regard proved too strong for my scruples. I was in a tight place and bound to use anything that fell into my hands which might throw any light on the problem. The seal of the envelope was broken. I drew out the enclosed note and read it. The knowledge I thus acquired was to stand me in good stead. The letter was as follows:

BURGMoor.

*Greenford, July 12, 1908.*

My Dear Mr. Tupper:

I know you will be surprised at my venturing

to address you upon such slight acquaintance; and more surprised still at the favor I am going to ask. I cannot explain myself, and yet I know you will do what I request and take me on faith.

You will be offered the church here for the summer. My father, who heard of you in New York, has arranged with the bishop of this diocese to have you come here. He will invite you to become a guest at Burgmoor. If you have any regard for me, if you mean a word you have said to me, do not come! No matter how fair the prospect may seem, it can bring you nothing but embarrassment and bitter regret—me nothing but lifelong misery.

If I can I will make everything clear to you when we return to New York. For the present my lips are sealed.

Do not disregard this warning, this appeal. I have every confidence in your generosity and trust you to burn this letter.

Sincerely your friend,

BEATRICE APTHORPE.

Was it possible? This young girl the writer of a play which would shortly make her famous? That was the first thing the letter brought home to me. Yes, she had the originality, the cleverness and the wit. Moreover, the handwriting was identical beyond question. To make sure I sought for the manuscript. The young parson had it! I was in possession of his sermon; but he had walked off with my play—Carl Krull's play, Beatrice Apthorpe's play.

Well, it would be returned to me sooner or later. The young minister had doubtless been aroused by the porter as the passenger for Hilltown. It was only twenty miles away; he would doubtless be back by the first morning train.

I consulted the time-table with feverish haste. Strangely enough, the danger from this quarter occurred to me for the first time. Yes, there was a train, both daily and Sunday, that left Hilltown at nine fifty-five and reached Greenford at ten minutes of eleven.

I looked at my watch; it was nearly half past ten. If I could give the Apthorpes the slip I

could make the two miles to the station with ease, as it was down-hill all the way. I could meet the parson at the train, change hats, coats and grips with him again and escape from Greenford by the same train that brought him.

The dominie would have just time to reach the church and preach his sermon. The Apthorpes would know nothing of the shift until the young minister came in with the processional. When he then appeared he would create something of a sensation in that select family circle, no doubt, and would have some pretty clever explaining to do for a while, after church. Of course I would tell him nothing, for he might insist upon my remaining to help him make matters clear, which would be inconvenient for me.

I was not at all sorry for him. He deserved to have a little trouble after all the worry he had given me. Besides, if he had any decency he would never have come to Greenford at all. I glanced the letter over again. Yes, the man who would come to Burgmoor after that appeal was a brute. I forgot the enormity of my own sins in

the contemplation of those of the Rev. Charles W. Tupper. He was beneath contempt, I then thought.

If I could have done it safely, I would have prevented his return. As I could not, there was nothing for it but to swap identities once more and resume my own name and vocation. When it was all over I didn't plan to give up journalism and study for the ministry.

There was no time for further cogitation. If I was to meet the clergyman at the Greenford station it behooved me to start. On returning to my room after breakfast I had taken my bearings a bit, and had an idea there was likely to be a way of escape down the back stairs.

The hall upon which my bedroom opened extended through to the rear of the house. It offered the most feasible mode of exit. There must be a back stairway and a rear door. Thence it should not be difficult to find a way through the gardens and into the fields beyond. Once there I could strike across lots for the road, and reach the station in a short time.

So I took my clerical friend's grip, opened the door, and stole along the hall. I found the back stairs, descended them stealthily, and made my way to the rear door of the house. I had met no one, and the path to the garden lay before me.

As I turned the corner of the hedge I ran plump into a man whom I took to be the gardener. He had no suspicion, but greeted me with: "The top of the mornin', sir," and touched his hat.

"I want to take a stroll through the hills and find a roundabout way to church," I explained. "Is there a back gate to the garden? Does it lead anywhere?"

"Oh, yes, sir," he replied with the utmost respect. "The path yonder through the bushes leads directly to the gate, and the bridle-path winds among the hills to a point a short distance below the church."

I followed his directions at a quick pace, though they were not just what I wanted. I was bound for the station, not the church. It was not likely that any of the family had seen me enter the gar-

den, and I was now concealed from the house by a mass of trees and shrubbery. The place was abloom with roses of all colors and varieties. Flowering plants of every description filled the air with the most delicate blends of perfume. Paths wound in and out among them, and there were many nooks and arbors of romantic seclusion and attractive shade. Had I been an invited guest at Burgmoor I should have been delighted to loiter there for hours.

As I finally made my way to the gate and prepared to scamper for the station to make up for the time I had lost in enjoying the beauties of the garden, my heart jumped into my mouth. There, sitting upon a bench by the gateway, smiling and apparently waiting for me, was Miss Beatrice Apthorpe! She rose to greet me, saying: "I thought you would probably take this way to church, Mr. Tupper."

She still called me Tupper. She still insisted upon my identity with her correspondent of St. Luke's rectory and her friend of Bath Beach. She knew better; there was no doubt of that.



For some reason, some powerful reason, she did not propose to acknowledge it. It was clear that before I could escape I should have to read her riddle.

As she arched her right eyebrow and looked up at me under veiled lashes with those roguish eyes of hers she seemed to be saying: "Riddle me, riddle me, ree, a hundred eyes and cannot see!"

Even in the midst of my dilemma I looked upon the youthful playwright with intense curiosity. It was easy enough to imagine how she had come to know Harry Fielding. The leading part in her comedy was exactly adapted to his style, and he would necessarily make a hit in such a rôle. But that offered no explanation of her apparent unwillingness to become his wife on the very eve of the wedding.

As I stood there, grip in hand, staring at her in surprise, she laid a little hand on my sleeve and said, with a childlike simplicity: "You don't look pleased to see me, Mr. Tupper. I have been waiting here for you for fifteen minutes. Do

you wish to be alone? Would you prefer to have me go away?"

When girls look most innocent they are usually up to the biggest mischief. Of course I could not be a brute and tell her that she was the last person I wished to meet at that particular time. I came as near saying it as I dared, though. "I am rather shaky on the sermon," I replied. "I thought I'd take a short walk through the hills and con it over a bit."

"Oh, any old sermon will do for us here!" She laughed. "You must have one already written in your bag. All you will have to do is to read it."

"I never read my sermons; that is a lazy man's way of doing things," I was forced to reply.

"You need a rest," she persisted. "Everything will be made easy for you. Mr. Dobbs, the lay-reader, will conduct the service, say the prayers and all that. All you will have to do is to impress people with your appearance and read the sermon."

The mischievous minx was actually persuading me, in a left-handed sort of fashion, to stay and

face it out. She seemed anxious for me to commit all sorts of sacrilege merely to gratify her whims and afford her amusement. So it seemed on the surface of things. But my eyes had been opened through reading that letter to the real Tupper. The bright little authoress had got into a bad box of some sort, with all her cleverness.

For some reason she was desperately anxious to keep Tupper out of Burgmoor and equally eager to have me remain. In this I should have been glad to accommodate her, provided Tupper would only stay away. As he was doubtless just on the point of arriving, it was suicide for me to dally longer.

"You are thoughtful," I said, "very thoughtful and very kind, all of you. We do not have our path smoothed out for us like that in New York."

"New York is lovely, I hate it here," she cried, while a look of desperation suddenly clouded her brow and her quick, bright eyes rolled restlessly, like some wild thing caught in a trap and panting for liberty.

If I could have helped her I might have sought

and won her confidence, then and there; but time was pressing and I had no wish to be burdened with a secret which I might afterwards be tempted to betray. Even a newspaper man has some decency in such matters, and I had enough on my conscience already.

"I must hurry on, Miss Apthorpe," I said, "or I shall be late—late for church, of course, I mean." I just saved myself.

"I will walk around by the bridle-path with you and show you the way," she replied, opening the gate. "You might miss it, you know, if you went alone, and never reach church at all. What would they do without the sermon they are anticipating so hopefully?"

"They seem to have done very well without it up to date," I retorted, in extreme vexation.

"No, they haven't. It's terribly stupid to have the service read and no minister to look up to and tell you things. The people here are simply ravenous for a sermon."

"They must be different from city people, then."

"They are—very."

"I am afraid my humble discourse will prove disappointing. I am not accustomed to such attention."

"Oh, they will dote on anything you say—anything!"

"But you could never keep up with me. I shall have to walk fast, very fast."

"Try me and see. I will race you to the church—or to any other place you choose!"

"I would be glad to accept the challenge—were I out of the ministry."

"You would lose. I won the prize at the Sunday-school picnic, last summer, as the fastest runner among the girls. I feel much stronger and 'faster' now than then."

There was a desperate defiance in the eyes of the young woman as she made this boast. I could well believe she was light on her feet and a high stepper. The covert threat of pursuit and exposure should I attempt to run away was not lost on me. She was evidently determined not to let me go.

"I was merely afraid I might tire you," I faltered.

"You look far more tired than I do," was her retort. It was true. I was tired, very tired; I was also badly scared.

"This is a fine place for a rest." I sighed. It might be; but I had found it pretty lively up to date.

"Are you coming?" she asked, swinging the gate wide open and looking quizzically into my face.

What could I do? There was no hope now of reaching the station in time to head off the minister.

A shrill whistle echoed among the hills. The morning train from Hilltown was approaching the Greenford station.

"I am coming," I replied.



## CHAPTER V

### AN INTERLOPER

I was neatly caught; Beatrice Apthorpe was too clever for me. For some reason, best known to herself, she was determined to hold me a prisoner.

Under happier circumstances I would have given my hope of salvation, or any other hope more probable of fruition, for a chance to wander through the Berkshire Hills with Beatrice Apthorpe for a companion, on a bright Sunday morning with nature glowing in beauty on every hand. I could have tolerated the idea of concluding that walk at the church door.

As it was, I was desperately anxious to make myself scarce. But when I disappeared I wanted to do it with decorum. The picture of a tall, lean man, in a silk tile and frock-coat, scampering

down a Berkshire knoll with a sweet young girl chasing after him in mad pursuit was not at all to my mind.

She had boasted she could outrun me and had covertly threatened to do it. I was not at all sure she would not be as good as her word. I would rather serve time in state's-prison than cut such a figure for ten seconds.

But the alternative was even worse. To be unmasked at the very door of the church, before the entire congregation, by the genuine parson, would place me in an attitude equally ridiculous and even more unpleasant. To proceed was ruin; to run away from a girl was disgrace. In despair I sat down upon a boulder at the side of the path, not daring either to advance or retreat.

"I am tired," I said. I spoke the truth.

"I fear it will prove too long a walk for you," remarked the girl sympathetically. "You should not have undertaken it." How she enjoyed quizzing me!

I was thinking fast. There might be a chance that Tupper had been carried beyond Hilltown.



Without his clerical coat and hat he might be afraid to put in an appearance at church, even if he came to Greenford in time. There were half a dozen chances that he might not turn up at the critical moment to two dozen that he would. Anyhow, I could walk with Miss Apthorpe as far as the road, take a good look when we came in view of the church, and if I saw Tupper drop everything and run for it.

I made a rapid calculation and concluded that, if the minister came in by the train that was just at that moment stopping at Greenford, he would arrive at the church at about the same time we did, provided he went there directly.

I had just reached this conclusion and was about to proceed when Miss Apthorpe addressed me: "I want to ask you a question, Mr. Plymp—Tupper, I mean."

I started as though I had been stung. I was stung. She not only knew I wasn't Tupper, but she was also aware of my true name! How had she discovered it? That ended all thought of running away for the present. Even if I escaped

temporarily, she could make things very disagreeable for me afterwards.

"Well, well, what, er—what is it?" I stammered.

"If a girl is married by a man who isn't a minister, is the marriage legal? Would she be bound by it in any way?"

I whistled. The cat was out of the bag. Through my help she was cherishing a wild hope of avoiding her approaching marriage. "How do you mean?" I asked.

"Well, suppose a girl had to be married, was forced to go through the ceremony, that there were no possible escape from it. Suppose on the other hand, she had rather die than be really, truly married, bound for life to one for whom she had no love or respect. If the minister that married them wasn't a minister at all, would she be a wife, would she be married? Would she be bound in any way by the ceremony?"

So that was the program! That was why she wanted the Rev. Charles W. Tupper out of it, and had use for Basil Plympton in his accidental

disguise. It was a foolish, silly scheme, I thought, and one to be discouraged. A girl who could conceive a dramatic plot so clever seemed astonishingly remiss in her conceptions when it came to facing the problems of real life. I had no intention of lending the slightest countenance to a notion so absurd.

"Would she be bound? Not unless a bogus minister happened to be a real justice of the peace," I replied, "or an alderman, or a notary public, or a governor, or a mayor, or something like that. It's a risky experiment. You never can tell."

"Oh!" she said, and her face fell.

"I knew a girl once," I continued, "who was married in fun by a newspaper reporter, and they found out afterwards that he was a commissioner of deeds. She was married so hard and fast they had a lot of fuss and trouble getting it annulled."

"Oh!" remarked Miss Beatrice Apthorpe once more.

"Most newspaper men are commissioners of deeds," I added.

I hoped that clinched it. If she thought to use me as a foil in her entanglement with Fielding, she took me for a bigger fool than I was. She looked so disconsolate, so utterly woe-begone as I drove in that last peg that my heart went out to the girl in sympathy, in spite of the way she was treating me.

"No such case as you suppose can possibly arise," I ventured to assert. "There are always hundreds of loopholes out of a difficult situation without making light of a sacred religious ceremony."

I meant it in all sincerity, but she responded with a body blow that turned my own words on me neatly. "Find one, then," she challenged with a mischievous laugh, "if you can!"

My own sad plight had been forgotten for the moment in my sympathy for her. That mocking laugh recalled it most vividly. I also was in a fix where I must "make light of a sacred religious ceremony" or take such consequences as this girl chose to visit on my head. She looked dangerous.

I did not dare defy her openly. For the time being I appeared to yield.

"Some newspaper men are not even commissioners of deeds," I admitted shamefacedly. "I would take an attorney's advice were I in that young lady's position. As far as my legal knowledge goes, however, a marriage by such a man as you describe would probably be of no more account than hopping over a broomstick, provided it were immediately repudiated."

"But could you wait long enough to make the man who thought he was your husband confess the manner in which he had acquired a hold on you and forced you to become an unwilling bride?"

"Probably. But with such a rascal as you describe, that might prove difficult. A father or a brother-in-law with a loaded revolver at his head would prove more persuasive, in my humble judgment."

"But suppose you were in a situation where every one was against you; where the truth was impossible of belief. Where you, yourself, were

compelled by force of circumstances to admit and to act a falsehood?"

"Such a situation will sometimes arise," I admitted ruefully; "but only where a man is tired out, half asleep and a great blockhead into the bargain."

"I am not talking about you—I mean, that is, about any man. I am talking about a girl—an impulsive, trusting, foolish girl who thought herself clever and able to take care of herself. Such a thing might occur with such a girl where the man she relied upon was still cleverer."

A dim inkling of the true situation began to dawn on me. Beatrice Apthorpe was in the grip of some extraordinarily tangled web from which she saw no way of escape save by means as unusual as her dilemma. But, in any event, she did not intend to let me go. Willing or unwilling, she was determined that I should remain and continue to play my part.

I was merely a pawn in her life's game of chess. A valuable pawn, though, and one she did not mean to lose until the time came to offer me as a

sacrifice on the gambit. My dangers were increasing hourly, for her bright eyes and winning face now held me in complete entrancement.

While we were talking we had been descending the bridle-path, and we now entered the road. Not five minutes walk to the right was the little church. The critical moment was at hand, but I consoled myself with the thought that if Miss Apthorpe knew who I was and the Rev. Charles W. Tupper knew who I wasn't, there really was not much to expose then and there. Tupper might think I had robbed him, however, and I could explain how things had happened privately much better than in the presence of such a mischievous young lady.

It was in this frame of mind that I beheld, coming rapidly forward, not two hundred yards from us, a young man somewhat curiously attired. He wore black and well-pressed trousers, shining patent-leather shoes, a clerical vest, a shapeless slouch hat and a jaunty outing jacket. In his hand he carried a suit-case. It was the Rev. Charles W. Tupper of St. Luke's rectory!

We recognized each other at about the same moment. Then I lost my head, dropped the grip I was carrying right in the road and turned to run for it. It wasn't physical fear but dread of exposure, and I thought that was all there was left for me to do. Miss Apthorpe held a contrary opinion. A little hand caught me firmly by the sleeve and held me fast. I could not have torn myself loose save by the exercise of brute force. It would never do to try to run with a young woman clinging to one's coat-tails. Even arrest and imprisonment would be better than that!

"What is the matter, Mr. Tupper?" she asked me, with astonishing coolness and a daring gleam in her bright eyes.

"Nothing, only I—I forgot something," I said, striving at the same time to loosen her hold with gentle effort. She held on convulsively. To escape I must hurt her, and I could not do that.

"Never mind," she said. "It's too late to go back for anything now. Too late, you under-



stand. People are already arriving at church."

The young man in the slouch hat and outrageous outing jacket came up with fire in his eye. There was nothing for it but to face it out. The Rev. Charles W. Tupper of St. Luke's rectory had a most unclerical, most unchristian bearing. I was really shocked, he seemed so fierce and revengeful. I grew more calm and gazed upon him with benign dignity.

"You rascal," he cried in a very loud, offensive voice, "give me my property and make yourself scarce or I will turn you over to the police."

It was very imprudent of him to talk like that if he wished to establish his identity. I began to hope, and also to grow in grace.

Miss Apthorpe uttered a little shriek and seized my arm with both her hands. She possessed histrionic powers and she now brought them into play with telling effect. "Oh, Mr. Tupper," she cried to me, "I am afraid of that man; he looks so queer and talks so loud; protect me from him!"

"Poor man, perhaps he is in pain. I am sure he means no offense," I reassured her, with a love-

your-enemy, forgive-everybody sort of a look.

"No offense to Miss Apthorpe," he returned more calmly; "no offense to her in any event. But you, sir, are an impostor and a villain, as she ought to know very well."

"How strangely he talks," cried my fair companion. "I never spoke to the man before in all my life."

"Never spoke to me!" cried the bewildered young parson. "Why, Miss Apthorpe, surely you are mistaken. Don't you remember last summer at Bath Beach?"

"What assurance!" exclaimed the young lady. "I do recognize him now, Mr. Tupper. He is one of those horrid and ridiculous newspaper men who pester us at every turn."

"Ridiculous!" shouted the outraged young dominie, his temper getting the better of him again. "You know me well enough, and I am not going to submit to this shameful treatment."

"Know you, indeed I do know you, sir," said the daring young lady.

"Who am I, then?" cried the excited young parson.

"You are Mr. Basil Plympton of the New York 'Express,' and you had better go away and let me alone, or I shall appeal to my father. He is coming up the road now; be warned in time." Then, turning to me, with an enigmatical expression, she continued: "I suppose the 'Express' sent its dramatic critic instead of just an ordinary reporter, because he might be expected to act in a less newspaperlike manner. I am disappointed in Mr. Plympton, who was once pointed out to me at the theatre as one of our most discriminating dramatic critics." The merry twinkle in her eye as she made that thrust strike home was hardly reassuring, though how she came to know me was now explained.

Some distance away the Apthorpe carriage was slowly mounting the hill. In it were Mr. and Mrs. Apthorpe, Mr. and Mrs. Gosse, and Master Howard Gosse. Desperate indeed must be the plight of a girl who was willing to venture such chances; but she took them unflinchingly and

with an aplomb calculated to carry conviction. I almost began to believe I was the minister, after all, and that Tupper wasn't.

Of the two I was the better dressed and much better behaved. His silk tile on my head had lost none of its sheen. His beautiful frock-coat on my shoulders hung in glossy folds. His ample collar on my neck shone white in the morning sun.

My collar on his neck was tight to suffocation, and its sharp points stuck into his chin, giving him an apoplectic appearance that was enhanced by the anger which flushed his face. My slouch hat on his head was the height of jaunty pertness. My outing jacket on his shoulders was redolent of tobacco. The odor was decidedly unclerical.

Notwithstanding the unfavorable testimony of my gaudy trousers, bright stockings, low tan shoes and red necktie, no jury in the country would fail to give me the verdict when I smiled upon them with brotherly love, even without the convincing testimony of Miss Beatrice Apthorpe. One of us was going to be in trouble pretty soon,

and I hoped to prove the more fortunate party. Even if they put me in jail I was resolved to forgive them and bless them. While I was in the ministry I wanted to live up to its noblest traditions.

The reverend young gentleman confronting us was dumfounded at thus being bereft of his identity, his wardrobe and his money while in the very act of triumphantly exposing an impostor and a thief, before the very door of his church and before the very eyes of the family whose guest he had expected to be.

I was really sorry for him. If I could have done so safely I would have thrown up the game that I was playing merely to gratify a girl's whim. He gave me no chance, in the first place. In the next, it wasn't my funeral. He had chosen to come to Greenford in the face of Miss Apthorpe's urgent request that he remain in New York. She was giving him about what he deserved, and avenging herself neatly.

I was forced to save my own skin, though I was helping her incidentally. She did all the

difficult part of the performance. 'All I had to do was to stand around and look my part. Christian charity comes easy when you are on top. I felt a brotherly love for everybody and tried to show it. I gazed at the stupefied young fellow with benign compassion.

"Do not be too hard upon him, Miss Apthorpe," I said. "Even a newspaper man is entitled to some sympathy when earning his bread and butter on a distasteful assignment. The sun is hot and he has been a bit touched, that's all."

My commiseration was the last straw. He looked as if he wanted to strangle me. His face was flushed with unseemly rage as he shouted: "Touched! touched! I should say I had been touched—to the tune of one hundred and fifty dollars, to say nothing of other things!"

"So?" I cried, "Poor fellow! If you are really in want I always have a little fund to draw upon for the needy in distress." So saying I tossed him his own purse, with the air of a belted knight bestowing a piece of gold on a leper, or a benevolent citizen dropping a penny in a blind man's

hat. "It is more blessed to give than to receive," I murmured.

The much-abused young parson stooped down to pick up his own purse. One couldn't blame him, yet it was right there he lost his only chance. While he was groveling for the money and I stood, erect and unruffled, the Apthorpe carriage drove by at a rapid trot.

"Hurry up, Beatrice, don't make Mr. Tupper late," called her father, as the carriage passed us.

Had Tupper scorned the money; had he boldly stopped the carriage and asserted his identity, gently but firmly, he must have carried the day. There were reasons of which I was at that time ignorant which would have inclined the family to suspect the girl of any desperate hoax, and they would have stood ready to give Tupper a hearing, which was all he needed.

But young Mr. Tupper was just as ignorant as I was of the strange situation. Moreover, as it turned out, he had certain tender sentiments toward the young lady who treated him so shamefully, and was ready to submit to anything rather

than join issue with her before her family and thus bring her into trouble.

So it came about that we won the day with all the chances against us. I had completely supplanted the young clergyman; to all intents and purposes he had lost his identity.





## CHAPTER VI

### I SPEAK OUT

"You will repent this, both of you," snapped the Rev. Charles W. Tupper, alias Basil Plympton, of the New York "Express."

"Come to church and hear a sermon on mountain daisies and beautiful snow. It will calm your nerves," coolly responded Basil Plympton, of the New York "Express," alias the Rev. Charles W. Tupper.

What more could I do for the poor outcast than to invite him to go to church and hear me read his own sermon? I would not be mean enough to deny him any little pleasure like that.

"Thank you, I will certainly accept your invitation," replied the aggressive dominie.

We turned our backs upon him with calm dignity and walked toward the little church whose bells were now tolling clamorously. Behind us,

close behind us, with vengeful brow, walked our persecuted persecutor.

I could hear his footsteps as they crunched the gravel, and it made me nervous; but I took care not to show it.

Beatrice Apthorpe still rested her soft, persuading hand upon my arm. It served to increase my stature and made my heart grow exceedingly bold. The morning was sweet, the verdure fresh, and far down the valley ran the happy river, flowing as doth kindness from the purified human heart. I was at peace with all the world and even forgave Tupper. Kindness wasn't flowing from his heart just then, but he had his excuses and I tried to make allowances for him.

I walked with Miss Apthorpe to her pew, where her family were already seated. I bowed to her in the presence of the curious rural congregation assembled, amid vast craning of necks and flutter of flaring headgear. Then I sauntered up the aisle, the observed of all observers. I passed the little organ where sat a young woman, impatient to begin, and entered the small

door at the north side of the tiny chancel.

At last were the direful splendours of those obstreperous plaid pantaloons to be cloaked in obscurity. Mr. Dobbs had a surplice in readiness, and clapped it on my shoulders as soon as I entered.

He was very impatient, was Mr. Dobbs. I was five minutes late, and the lay-reader was the soul of promptitude. He was also the soul of jealousy. That a man of his ability should be supplanted by a city parson was not at all to his mind.

The organ was now resounding through the small edifice with a solemn rumble, and the little choir was assembling for the processional that was to follow. Eight small, shock-headed urchins were treading upon one another's toes and whispering personal comments upon the new parson, while four young women in snow-white robes were casting either shy or sly glances at me. A hymnal was thrust into my hands by some one, and the little boys began to march in. The young ladies followed. The lay-reader and I fell in behind, side by side.

"Jerusalem the golden," we were singing. Among my few personal advantages is a mellow bass. When I was a little shaver I sang in an Episcopal choir, though my people were all Congregationalists.

From out the dim past a vision of that little church rose before me and transported me to eastern Massachusetts. We called it the "orthodox" church, to distinguish it from the schismatic Unitarians. I could see the good old country folk in the pews about me, while my mother sat by my side and held my hand in hers. There had my parents worshipped, there their parents before them. Though far from righteousness I had trod my wayward steps, though the old faith had often been forgotten, a touch of early reverence fell upon me.

There was not much ritual in that old church. There were long sermons and hard-and-fast theology. There was a very long Sunday-school, following the service, that spun things well out into the afternoon while all the little ones became hungry and consequently cross.

As I entered behind that swaying little procession of songsters and sang the hymn myself with a right good-will, I felt very low and sinful. I was a fraud, a cheat and an impostor. That was not what worried me. I served as well as another, perhaps. Had I been duly ordained; had I been rightfully in the pulpit, I might have felt much the same. I was a mere man, standing before my fellow men and women, to represent the Holy One.

I was blind, seeking to lead others as blind as I toward a light which I did not see. I have had more charity and leniency toward the clergy of all denominations from that hour.

I was familiar enough with the ritual, from my early experience as a choir-boy, to have put the whole thing through without the help of Mr. Dobbs. Had I known or guessed what an awful nuisance he was going to prove, and what a dreadful predicament he was going to plunge me into, I should have declined his assistance at the outset and sent him packing to his home in Highfield, where he belonged.

It wasn't the ritual that bothered me. A lay-reader has an easy task. The dread moment was approaching. The sermon must soon begin!

Under my robe I clutched desperately the Rev. Charles W. Tupper's manuscript, but my soul rebelled at the notion of reading it. I was really in earnest about that church service. I had not had time to go to church for a long while, and my religious nature was reawakened.

Being forced by circumstances over which I had no control to sit in the pulpit and pass myself off as the minister, I threw myself into the part with whole-souled earnestness and perfect reverence for the church on earth. In fact, my troubles did not spring from too little sincerity, but rather from a superabundance of it.

I didn't want to preach a sermon while the poor fellow whose identity I had appropriated sat before me and listened to his own fine periods with woe-begone countenance. He looked unhappy enough, as it was. I was averse to stealing his sermon, after all the other wrongs I had done him; and I would not do it unless really obliged to.

Could I not rise to the occasion, and incidentally convince Miss Beatrice Apthorpe that there was something in me of worth and truth in the very face of all the chances and mischances that had made me appear ridiculous in her sight? Yes, it was certainly worth while trying, anyway.

How demurely she sat there with her family in their pew! How her roguish face had softened with the dignity of the hour! And yet—and yet—she was responsible for it all. She had “put up the job,” she had forced the sacrilege. She could look as pious as she pleased, the fact remained.

Well, we were in the same box, and she was probably thinking the same thing about me. Wasn't I compelled to look saintly also? If I could preach my own sermon I would to some extent escape hypocrisy.

I had a capacious memory, full of all sorts of odds and ends. My mind was a literary scrap-book, arranged helter-skelter. I knew a number of quotations from famous preachers of various

denominations. I mentally sorted out a few of these and conned them over.

This was my program: I would try hard to give them an original sermon, newly coined from a fresh and virgin mint. If I stuck fast anywhere I could anchor to one of these quotations until the storm blew over and I was once more riding calmly on the smooth seas of oratory. If all else failed I had the Rev. Charles W. Tupper's orthodox discourse to fall back upon.

The time sped rapidly for me. I never before realized how much faster the minutes fly behind the pulpit than in front of it. Had I been in a pew that morning I should have been bored to death long before the sermon began, and longed for the fresh air and bright sunshine without. As it was, I wasn't bored. Whatever else may have been the matter with me, bored I assuredly was not.

In the rear of the church my eye rested upon the sad face of the Rev. Charles W. Tupper. How vulgar he looked, how out of place in a pew at church. Who would believe him presentable in



the pulpit? There he sat, all manner of uncharity in his heart and upon his countenance. As I gazed upon him I grew in grace and benign serenity.

I began well. I addressed them appropriately as "dearly beloved brethren," and started in to give them my own ideas of the cosmos generally. Having covered a wide field in a few minutes, by way of preamble, I advanced my thoughts on a vital question that confronts us all, of whatever creed or denomination.

"If a man lose a hand or an eye," I said, "does he place it in a coffin and bury it with many tears? Do his friends gather about the ground where it lies and offer prayers and lamentations, and strew flowers? It has been plucked out and cast from him. One of his members has perished. Has his soul, or any fraction of his soul perished with it?

"Is the whole greater than the sum of all its parts? Does the whole body, indeed, contain the soul at all, in any other sense than did the hand

or the eye that are dead, but which once manifested the soul's presence to other souls?"

That is all I care to quote of my remarks. I reproduce this much only because these are the words that Mr. Dobbs took exception to and made such a fuss about; so much of a fuss that it brought a number of people into difficulties, including myself.

I was much in earnest about all this. The question of mortality or immortality is a live one yet, out of the pulpit as well as in it, among rank heretics as well as in the fold of true believers. I had thought much about it.

But this sort of newspaper theology, fresh from the editorial sanctum of the "Express," was bound to create something of a stir among the conservative denizens of the Berkshires.

"Perhaps I am going it a little strong," it occurred to me, as I sensed the magnetic waves afloat. "It will not do to preach a sermon that will make any fuss." Had I but known it, I might as well have kept on to a finish, as the fuss was already brewing.

The orator who hesitates in the midst of an extemporaneous discourse is generally lost. I caught the eyes of Beatrice Apthorpe. They were fixed upon me as though she would read my inmost soul. They had a strange light in them, the insignia of a mighty fraternity whose free-masonry exchanges signals among its members in every age and clime. Yes, she too was a slave of the lamp. Her keen mind was scampering through vistas of sympathetic speculations.

Even if it had been wise to continue the reconstruction of the heavens above, the earth beneath and the waters under the earth, the divine afflatus, which had thus far borne me aloft and way over the heads of the congregation had disappeared.

Mentally I made a drowning man's clutch for one of those fine quotations: "As another great preacher has said—ahem!"

The words would not come and even the introduction was a sad miscue. There was a half-suppressed titter as I hesitated. "Of course you un-

derstand I mean another great preacher besides myself," I explained.

That was worse yet, and I did not dare try to explain it again. There is no knowing what might have happened had I attempted it. Desperately I fell back upon my last line of entrenchments. I drew out the Rev. Charles W. Tupper's manuscript and began to read his safe and sane platitudes.

They had a very soothing effect. Their high-flown generalities, their vacuous climaxes, their inane periods were all proportioned to the atmosphere of the place. Somehow they fitted most appropriately into the surroundings, although the city editor of any New York newspaper would have tossed the sermon into the waste-basket as being utterly without human interest.

One star differeth from another in glory: there is one glory of newspaper diction and another glory of clerical diction. I had never really got this through my head until I came to preach myself, then it became self-evident. To talk newspaper theology in the pulpit is like mending old

garments, respectable and venerable garments, with new cloth. It was like a patch cut out of my London trousers and sewn on the seat of clerical breeches. That is what an unbiased auditor thought of my first, last and only sermon. She told me about it afterwards, when we knew each other well enough for her to speak her mind freely.

Well, if my own sermon was a bad fizzle, the Rev. Charles W. Tupper's purloined manuscript pulled me through the knot-hole. I read it in sonorous tones, but with none of the energy or enthusiasm I had displayed in advancing my own crude ideas. That also was an improvement. I am told I did it with a dignity, gravity and decorum which certified to my absolute orthodoxy and ultra good-form.

Moreover, it served to establish my stolen identity beyond cavil or dispute in the town of Greenford. I might be a rash young man with peculiar and startling ideas, as was indicated by the introductory discourse; but I was also evidently a trained writer of sermons, conventional sermons,

the kind that soothe one spiritually and mentally,  
and make one feel very good and very sleepy.

I glanced at Beatrice Apthorpe as I sat down.  
Her right eyebrow was elevated to its drollest  
arch, and her eyes were radiant with suppressed  
mischief.

## CHAPTER VII

### FLIGHT

But I had other things to do in the world besides furnishing amusement for Miss Beatrice Apthorpe. I had been betrayed into carrying matters much too far through the efforts of that whimsical young lady, and if I got off with a year in the penitentiary I should be lucky.

Of course she was very charming and bewitching, but she was far over my head, and the sooner I put her out of sight and mind the better it would undoubtedly be for my peace and happiness.

From the young parson I could hope for no mercy. If I could have put through the service without delivering his sermon there might have been some hope of making him ultimate amends. While I was vaingloriously peddling out my own views he had worn a smile of contemptuous

amusement. "Give the impudent impostor enough rope and he will hang himself," it had seemed to say.

When I drew out his manuscript and began to read his sermon the sneer melted into anguish, the leer into rage and dismay. In his eyes I had committed the unpardonable sin, and he would leave no stone unturned to punish me here, while using his personal influence to see that I was provided with a good warm berth hereafter. I might triumph for a season, but the day of reckoning would surely come. As long as he remained on the scene Greenford was no safe abiding-place for me.

The closing hymn and recessional followed in quick succession, and I marched out behind the choir by the side of Mr. Dobbs.

The full enormity of my sins had been growing upon me gradually, and the nervous tension was tightening every moment. I was in a cold perspiration, and as I removed the surplice I mopped off my moist brow with its ample folds, not thinking what I was doing.



That careless indiscretion settled my case with Dobbs. He snatched the sacred garment from my polluting grasp with an angry jerk. He had been boiling within throughout the service, and the indignity with which I had treated the holy robe was like a match to gunpowder.

"Heresy and sacrilege ever go hand in hand!" he cried.

"Heresy your grandmother!" I snorted, losing patience just when it was most needed.

"My grandmother was no heretic," retorted the literal Dobbs, "and I will thank you to make no aspersions upon her sacred memory. She was a far better Christian than you, with all your citified airs."

I cooled off a bit. It would never do to enter upon an unseemly dispute with the lay-reader before the members of the choir. I had enough troubles on my hands already.

"I intended no offense, sir," I replied, with my blandest smile. "I merely wanted to convey the impression that my discourse was absolutely orthodox, and my wish that your respected

grandparents and all your other relatives could have been on hand to hear it."

"You have denied some of the cardinal elements of Christian doctrine. You have struck at the foundation of the Apostles' creed," asserted Dobbs in a tense whisper. He didn't want a scene any more than I; but he had his convictions, and he intended to give them airing.

We retired to the little robing-room to fight it out privately. I had no time to lose, but I could not afford to depart without convincing Dobbs that I had taught true doctrine. I wanted to sow a little grain of mustard-seed in the church universal, and then stand by on the outside and watch it grow. I did not want to tell my newspaper friends that I couldn't even hold up my end with an unanointed lay-reader.

All the same, such was the fact; Dobbs carried all the guns. He didn't do anything else all winter but talk theology; he had all the fine points at his tongue's end and would not let me put in a word edgewise. His idea of argument was to do all the talking himself, and then lose

his temper and sulk when his opponent remained unconvinced. He was one of the toughest doctrinal propositions I ran across during my brief clerical career.

Anyway, he went, in fact slammed the door behind him and slammed it hard. I may have worked that little grain of mustard-seed into his system somewhere, but it has been a long time sprouting. The garniture of pickles and sandwiches would be scarce indeed if all the mustard plantations worked like that.

Well, it was a comfort to be alone for a minute, nevertheless. The small robing-room was lighted by a single window. The little church backed up against a steep hill, and the room's solitary window looked out on it. You entered the edifice up a flight of steps, but the ground rose rapidly, and the window-sill was on a level with the slope of the hill.

I raised the sash cautiously and peered out. A thick growth of young trees and underbrush concealed this part of the church from the roadway. The path to freedom lay before me.

I could hear a murmur of voices from the church. Evidently several members of the congregation were waiting to seize upon me when I came out. The Apthorpes were doubtless among the expectant ones.

In spite of my apparent boldness and self-confidence, Dobbs had shaken me up badly. To be accused of heresy is a serious thing for a young parson, even when he is as genuine as the best-advertised brands of baking-powder. A spurious article cannot afford to be anything but ultra-conservative. The members of a congregation can be as liberal in their views as they please, but they expect their minister to deal out sulphur and brimstone, or they begin to doubt the sincerity of his faith.

My sympathy was aroused for the poor young fledglings who are forced to meet such criticism. I didn't blame Tupper for confining himself to safe and sane platitudes. If I had stuck to what he had written Dobbs would have had no chance to criticise me.

I took my hat and grip and crawled out of the

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window. Behind me was controversy and detection; before me was the peaceful hillside and the calm of natural beauty. I had had enough of the ministry and of the ideals that are not to be disturbed.

Beatrice Apthorpe would have to struggle with her life problem as best she might without further aid from me. I had a good chance to decamp, and I proposed to make the most of it. There were other heretic-hunters waiting to devour me.

It was half past twelve already. At one o'clock Harry Fielding would arrive. By two the Apthorpe family would be gathered about the dining-table. I shouldn't be there to give them another silent blessing with devotional atmosphere oozing from me, but over the hills and far away.

I slipped cautiously out of the window and began my hurried scramble up the hillside. The brambles caught at the dominie's frock-coat and made scratches here and there. That didn't matter; it wasn't mine. Besides, the job of wearing out my London trousers on the Berkshire Hills had begun at last. That is what I had come for.

Up, up I went, now walking, now crawling on hands and knees, now going back to pick up the silk tile which was continually getting knocked off and rolling down hill.

In half an hour I had overcome all obstacles and sat down on a rock, under a widespreading oak, with the parson's hat resting on one side of me and his grip on the other. It was a lovely day and a fine view. Far below was the church. Further on was the Apthorpe mansion with its beautiful grove of maple trees and decorative gardens surrounding it. Beyond that, two miles below, but still in full view, was the station.

A little toy train puffed up silently and stopped, then went on. There was a toy carriage waiting there, probably the same victoria which had met me that morning. Two little ants crawled into it. They were men, of course, guests of the Apthorpes. One of them was doubtless Fielding and the other probably some friend of his brought up for the occasion, to see him through the ordeal of wedlock.

Beatrice Apthorpe was in for it, apparently.

Well, if the bogus parson had seen fit to make himself scarce, the real one was in no position to establish his identity and officiate at the ceremony the following noon. The girl was no worse off than if Tupper had heeded her request and failed to put in an appearance. I had done her that much service at least by my madcap folly.

I drew out her photograph and gazed upon it intently. I did not like the idea of seeing her married to that fellow Fielding, but I could do nothing to prevent it. I would probably never see her again, and her picture was the only memento of my adventure I intended to keep. I thought to conceal the grip, coat and hat in a hollow of the oak, where they would be safe enough until I could arrange for their transfer to their true owner. Hatless and in shirt-sleeves I would make my way to a nearby town, say Highfield, and make necessary purchases. The trouble was, the minister had my grip and in it the manuscript so prized by Carl Krull.

I enjoyed that rest. It was the first real rest

I had had that day. How pure the air was, how fresh, how free!

"You infernal scoundrel, I have you at last!" Those were the rough words that broke in upon my day-dream.

A hand had seized me from behind, and I was being shaken violently by the collar. I slipped out of the frock-coat like an eel, leaving it in the grasp of my assailant, and turned to face him. It was the Rev. Charles W. Tupper, of St. Luke's rectory.

Ministers are but men, and they must be forgiven if they display the passions and courage of men when they are goaded past endurance. The young clergyman had been abused most grievously. I didn't blame him, but I wasn't going to stand helpless and let him pommel me. I was human, too, and thought there was no need for him to be so rough. I had been kind to him and forgiven him, and there is a limit to all things. He made me angry.

We didn't stop to argue, we just went at it. I know that members of the congregation



are apt to feel ugly after a long church service, before dining. That is a matter of personal observation. I have been told that the same is true of clergymen, only more so. That is purely a matter of hearsay, unless my brief experience can be counted. Tupper had written a sermon and I had preached it; between us it had proved a success. The result was that we were both very cross. I am afraid we let fall some ejaculations which ill accorded with the sylvan beauty of the scene.

He drew blood from my nose and I closed up his left eye. I regret to state that we had gone at each other like a pair of bruisers. Having vented our spleen by inflicting these personal injuries we each stood panting for breath, glaring at one another.

This pause gave us time to think. I knew I couldn't lick him without being laid up myself for a week or more. He was similarly situated. He couldn't thrash me without suffering more or less disagreeable personal disfigurement.

If I could have taught him the lesson I thought

he deserved I would have done so, and then visited him at the hospital and brought him flowers and books. I have every reason to suppose he would have been just as kind to me after having had the satisfaction of taking it out of my hide.

As neither of us was able to administer condign punishment without proportionate suffering, our Christianity began to reassert itself. What we couldn't do for ourselves the Lord would surely do for us in good time. If you can't lick a man you can always picture him to yourself suffering the torments of the damned in another world, and it's a heap of comfort.

His bruised eye and my twisted nose had also served to cultivate a vast degree of mutual respect. Men are only overgrown boys in such matters.

"Perhaps we have been a little hasty, brother," said the young parson, feeling of his eye.

"Somewhat rash on the whole," I admitted, holding my bleeding nose.

"It would have been far more seemly to have

sat down and talked over our differences like gentlemen," he regretted.

"It isn't too late." I smiled, and we sat down.

"I cannot understand you at all," he began.

"I will try to explain myself, then," I said.

"Why did you take my berth and bribe the porter?" he asked.

"I didn't; it was all a mistake," I answered.

"I thought so at first, but your subsequent conduct hardly tallies with such a theory. It seems you are a newspaper man."

"One thing led to another," I apologized. "I was half asleep and thought I was being taken to a hotel. When I awoke I was in a private residence. I have been trying to get out of the mess ever since."

I could see the smile of growing incredulity upon his face. He said that any man who had the impudence to go into another man's pulpit and deliver a stolen sermon as I had done, with the genuine minister sitting in a pew before me, could not plead innocence.

We were both growing angry about it, and

the conference seemed likely to end in another encounter. Neither of us wanted that, so I said: "Well, what difference does it make? The thing is done now and cannot be undone. Take your property, give me mine, and I'll most gladly call it square and disappear. I will never trouble you again, I assure you. I wouldn't be a parson for a hundred thousand dollars a year."

"But where will that leave me?" he asked. "Can't you see that you have ruined me by your glaring but successful imposture? No one will believe that I am I, when they have such reasons for supposing that you are I."

"Oh, that's easy, you can go back to New York. They know us both there."

"But my place in New York is filled. I have been sent here, and here they don't know the difference between us," protested the perplexed young cleric.

"Well, send for the bishop, or somebody, and get identified."

I was serious, but he took it wrong—seemed to think I was making a joke of it. "It isn't any

laughing matter," he said. "Do you think I am going to place myself in a position so utterly ridiculous? Just think what a light I'd stand in before the good people of my church! They would laugh me out of the parish."

I laughed myself. I couldn't help it, he looked so upset and vexed. When a man has once lost his identity it is not so easy to step back into the old place, as I was in the end to learn by sad experience.

"What do you propose doing about it?" I asked, sobering down a bit. The case had a very serious side to it, and I could see that the young parson did not appreciate the humor of the situation.

"I propose that you shall repair the wrong you have done me and make amends for the outrage you have committed upon me," he replied firmly. "We will go back to the Apthorpes together, in our own proper persons, clothed in our own proper garments, and explain the mistake, if mistake it were."

"Not on your clerical tintype!"

"Sir!"

"Pardon the vernacular. The sentiment remains unchanged, but if you insist I'll withdraw the photograph."

"Why should you refuse to do me that simple justice?" he asked, frowning darkly.

"In the first place, because it might prove embarrassing for me."

"Oh, I wouldn't let them hurt you."

"Thank you politely. I do not mean to give them the chance."

"You are guilty, and are afraid to face the music like a man and a gentleman."

"Put it that way, if you like. By the way, has it occurred to you that they wouldn't believe either of us?"

"Why not?"

"For one reason, because Miss Apthorpe is possessed of a strange hallucination. She thinks I am you and you are I, and nothing could convince her to the contrary."

"Absurd!"

"It is a fact none the less. She is committed

to that point of view. She cannot admit the mistake."

The young clergyman relapsed into silence. There were difficulties in the way of his rehabilitation which had not at first occurred to him. Beatrice Apthorpe did not want him at Burgmoor, and meant to keep him at a distance for a while by fair means or foul. Still, he could not see any way out of his difficulties which would not leave him in a position far more unpleasant.

"I shall have to insist upon it all the same," he announced as the irrevocable result of his cogitations.

"Insist upon what?"

"Upon your returning with me and putting me right in the eyes of the Apthorpe family and the good people of Greenford. No other honorable course is open to either of us."

"I do not agree with you."

"I did not anticipate that you would," he replied doggedly, "but I am going to make you. I shall follow you wherever you go, and at the first town we reach I shall turn you over to the

police. Then I will send for Mr. Apthorpe. Believe me, my dear sir, I am in earnest. I have made up my mind. You must either come with me willingly, like a gentleman, or I shall compel you to do justice like a thief. How will you have it?"

I began rather to like that dominie. He was no milksop; he knew his rights and he wouldn't be buncoed or bluffed out of them. The position he took was to me obnoxious in the extreme, to be sure, but from his point of view it was the right one.



## CHAPTER VIII

### A CHANCE ENCOUNTER

"Perhaps we may find some form of compromise," I suggested.

"There can be no compromise," the Rev. Mr. Tupper insisted stubbornly.

"Miss Apthorpe won't have you at Burgmoor; she asked you not to come and gave you fair warning."

"You read other people's letters, it seems," he sneered.

"Not at all. I am in her confidence to some extent, as you have reason to know. She is in desperate straits. She objects to this marriage, and for some reason the family is forcing her into it."

"She told you that?"

"Not exactly. It isn't hard to guess. Much

easier than to imagine why you failed to respect her wishes in the matter."

He flushed a little at that. "I would do anything in the world to serve her," he muttered.

"Then why did you come?" I demanded.

"I had my reasons."

"Undoubtedly."

"But I am not accountable for them to you."

"Perhaps not. None the less, it would make the way out of this mess much easier if I knew all the facts."

"You know all that is necessary."

"Well, since you refuse to enlighten me, I will make my compromise proposition in the dark. It is impossible for us to go back together. It would make a scene and probably we should both be turned out as two of a kind."

He winced. He knew there was a chance of it, but felt obliged to take the risk. "What then?" he asked with some curiosity.

"Let me go back again and continue to play the game out. I will prepare the way for the explanation and make it at the most favorable

opportunity. You remain at the hotel here until I send for you."

"And how soon will that be?"

"Give me twenty-four hours and I will set you right, and get out of the scrape myself into the bargain."

"Do you propose to perform the marriage-ceremony?"

"There will be no marriage," I asserted. That was true, as I thought. There would be no marriage if I officiated.

The dominie considered the matter and shook his head. "It will not do," he said. "I cannot trust you. I have too much at stake. While I was waiting you might disappear, and then I might have to call in some one from New York to identify me, or to go back there in disgrace."

"Why can't you trust me?"

"Have I any reason to?"

"You have a most excellent reason," I said impressively. "If we cannot come to terms you may hand me over to the police; but that will

not help your case much at present. Besides, you have as much of my property as I have of yours. How about my possessing equal ability to hand *you* over to the police? Furthermore, my dear sir, think of the undesirable publicity for a man of your instincts and calling. You would never hear the last of it."

The last two points told. After some mental digestion of them, the Rev. Charles W. Tupper said:

"What do you want to do?"

"Let me go back to Burgmoor, and give me twenty-four hours to set things to rights. I can fix it all up nicely in that time."

"What are you going to do?" he persisted.

"Stand by Miss Apthorpe until she is out of danger; then she can smooth out our troubles with a wave of her hand."

"That may prove more difficult than you imagine," rejoined the dominie.

"What do you know about it?"

"Not much. There is some mystery, but I am not in the secret. I had thought I might help her

myself in some way when the proper time came. That is one reason why I felt it my duty to disregard her request. But I had others. I met her last summer at Bath Beach, and I confess I was very much attracted, though she is so far out of my reach. Then she wrote me requesting that I refuse the call here. When I received her letter I was already pledged to come. The week before I had received a note from Mr. Fielding, her fiancé. He said that he had not the pleasure of my acquaintance, but that I had been selected as the clergyman who was to officiate at her wedding, which was to take place at Burgmoor shortly, and that he was very anxious there should be no delay as he was about to sail for Europe. Therefore he must request me to be on hand without fail. He enclosed a check for two hundred dollars. I am poor. When her letter came I had already spent part of the money. The rest was in the purse you so graciously returned to me."

There was a grave twinkle in his eye as he referred to my generosity. He had a sense of

humor, had the parson. I was growing to like him.

"That actor chap foresaw the girl might play some trick on him and forestalled her," I said. "It's a queer game they are playing down there, and I wish I could get to the bottom of it. With your help, I may."

"You will be taking very long chances," he warned.

"My dear fellow, with you for a friend instead of an enemy I am perfectly safe. You have no notion how firmly my identity is established. I breakfasted with the family and talked about all your affairs."

"How could you do it?"

"Miss Apthorpe gave me the points, and luck ran my way."

"I fear that young woman will come to no good end," said Tupper disapprovingly. "She seems to be as false as she is fair."

"All good-looking women are that way more or less," I generalized cynically. "Besides, she seems to be in a bad scrape, and women will do

all sorts of queer things when driven to the point of desperation."

"We are all acting rather queerly, and fate seems to force us to continue the farce," said the dominie. "But mark you, if I ever let another man sleep in my berth because he looks tired and I am sorry for him I hope I may get into a still worse pickle."

"Amen!"

Having agreed upon this compromise arrangement, we cemented our alliance by exchanging the grips and their contents. He had his baggage with him still, having no place where he could leave it. He had not the good-fortune, like myself, of being a welcome guest. I gave him back his sermon and he returned to me the manuscript of the play, "Diamonds Lead, but Hearts are Trumps."

He let me keep a couple of his clerical collars and supplied a black necktie which had been overlooked in my haste. He also loaned me a white shirt and a soberer pair of socks. His feet were

much larger than mine, so we could not exchange shoes.

He seemed to grow much interested in costuming my part to better effect, and lent me his clerical vest, taking my light one in exchange. That encouraged me to presume upon his good nature.

"Now you have gone so far, couldn't you swap trousers?"

He looked at me in blank dismay. "That passes the limits of good nature," he said, shaking his head. "I want you to succeed, but I would rather face any sort of disgrace or ridicule than—than wear *those things*. Pardon my speaking so frankly. You brought up the subject, you know."

"Oh, never mind," I replied with affected carelessness. "While you were about it I thought you might be willing to throw in the trousers, that was all."

"I'd be glad to oblige you," he replied solemnly, "but really, you couldn't expect that."



I sighed, but I had played the game successfully so far, trousers and all, and I thought I could pull it through. It did not occur to me that fresh complications might have arisen during my absence.

It was agreed that Tupper should put up at the small village hotel and remain there that night. If he heard nothing from me before two o'clock the following afternoon he was to walk boldly into Burgmoor.

Meanwhile I promised to keep him posted unless unforeseen difficulties arose, and to send for him at once as soon as the final explanation was in order.

We shook hands in a fashion quite friendly, considering the way in which our interview had begun. His eye was still a bit discolored and my nose somewhat swollen, but otherwise we were none the worse off physically.

Then he left me, making his way toward the village at the foot of one side of the hill, while I took the path toward the church on the other slope.

As I emerged upon the road I ran right into a phaeton being driven at a rapid pace by a young lady who looked woe-begone and desperate. When she saw me she reined up suddenly and her face was wreathed in smiles.

"Why Mr. Plympton—Mr. Tupper, I mean—I thought we had lost you!"

"I was just taking a walk among the hills," I apologized.

"What, what is the matter with your—how did you hurt yourself?"

"I tripped and fell. Does it look very bad?"

"What a shame! No, a little red, perhaps, that's all. Won't you get in and drive back with me? We shall be late for lunch, but they were still waiting for you when I left."

I accepted the invitation.

"Why did you run away?" she said reproachfully. "I thought you had promised to stand by me. It was mean to desert me like that, when I had risked so much to keep you."

"It would have been folly to stay, with that young clergyman thirsting for revenge. I had

to arrange matters with him, or I should never have dared to return."

"You have seen him. then?"

"Yes."

"And he will be generous, will make no fuss?"

"For the present he will let matters stand until they can be explained."

"You are very clever, Mr.—Mr. Tupper. That is why I have such urgent need of your help."

"Not a bit; I have been very stupid. It was all a mistake of the sleeping-car porter and of the servants, Miss Apthorpe."

"Or a smart trick on a mooning minister."

"Don't you believe me, either? Remember your own statement that there are situations where the truth is impossible of belief, where one is forced to admit and act a falsehood. That has been my case; it is my case still. I have promised that young clergyman to return and explain things."

"Not right away?"

"Within twenty-four hours."

"Oh, that's all right. Lots of things can happen in twenty-four hours."

"Most anything, even the loss of one's identity," I assented.

"How funny!" she said, and again I was treated to that musical laugh.

"Very absurd," I admitted ruefully.

The girl had cheered up wonderfully since she had recaptured her prisoner. She informed me afterwards that she had waited anxiously about the church until some one told her that I had been seen walking far up the hill. She had made up her mind to try and intercept me by driving around through a woodland roadway.

As we approached Burgmoor we reached the point where the road forked. Down the hill it wound its sinuous way to the station far below. Up the hill it ascended to the summer place of the Apthorpe family.

"We are at the parting of the ways," I said. I had taken the reins and stopped the horse.

"Why so?" she asked in alarm.

"I cannot proceed in this matter blindfold, Miss Apthorpe. I do not wish to intrude upon your affairs; but if I must be concerned in them it is necessary that I should know all the facts. I am willing to continue the adventure, but even to oblige you and the good young parson I cannot proceed with my eyes shut. The way at best is full of pitfalls, and I need all the light there is to guide me."

"You would not believe me, no one will," said the girl disconsolately.

"I promise in advance to place absolute faith in every word you say."

"How can you, when my own father and brother-in-law, my own mother and sister laugh my story to scorn?"

"Because my calling deals with the strange and unusual in life. Nothing is impossible to a newspaper man, however incredible it might seem to others."

"And you will promise to stand by me; swear not to desert me again, whatever happens?"

I might be running my neck into a noose, but

I promised nevertheless, and, turning the horse up the hill, drove on toward Burgmoor.

"How could any power on earth force you to marry against your will?" I asked as we wound up the hillside.

"It will take a long while to explain all the ins and outs of the matter," she answered. "There is no time now. We must not be too late for lunch or they will ask embarrassing questions. I will meet you in the garden this evening, and 'tell all.' I shall be putting great trust in you, Mr. Plympton."

"I shall not betray it," I said, "though I don't know why you trust me."

"I trust you because of some of the things you said in the sermon this morning. The first part of it, the part that made the talk."

"Oh, that was newspaper theology. It won't go in Greenford, or in any other pulpit, I'm afraid."

"Perhaps not," she replied thoughtfully, "though I think you are mistaken. Anyway, I like newspaper theology; I like newspaper men."

She looked at me with an expression that seemed to say, "I like you."

Basil Plympton were better never born than lose his heart to this daughter of the Apthorpes, married or single. That was the idea uppermost in my mind as we turned into the driveway.



## CHAPTER IX

### THE BEST MAN

As Beatrice Apthorpe anticipated, we were late for lunch. They had given us up and, skipping the blessing, had begun the soup. I had that much to be thankful for, but other troubles were in store for me.

The company had been augmented by two new arrivals. One of these I took to be Harry Fielding. He was a large, good-looking man; but I had no time to inspect him carefully. The other guest who had come with him claimed my whole attention.

Seated at the actor's elbow, in the midst of this exclusive family circle, was a man whom I recognized immediately as Samuel Sears, a star reporter for the New York "Gazette." We knew each other fairly well.

Sears looked at me in astonishment. I gazed



upon him with a bland stare, as though he were a perfect stranger. Then he choked in his soup; took a whole spoonful of it down his windpipe, I presume. He made a disgraceful exhibition of himself, and I was justified in declining to acknowledge his acquaintance.

As we entered the family arose to greet us, and Sears staggered to his feet, gasping and red in the face.

I was presented to the newcomers as the Rev. Charles W. Tupper, of St. Luke's rectory. Then we took our seats, a place for Miss Apthorpe having been reserved at my side. The Apthorpes began talking about my sermon before I was well in my chair.

Sears stared at me in bewilderment, and I returned his gaze benevolently, but without a shadow of recognition. There was nothing for it but to face him down and out.

I rehearsed the action of the trustees of St. Luke's on the Brownlee bequest, and aired my views of the topic of tainted money. And the sermon, above all things the sermon! I rubbed

that into Samuel Sears' moral consciousness with sand-paper and Sapolio. He began to waver in his conviction, and mopped his forehead in perplexity.

Miss Apthorpe noticed that the friend of her fiancé looked at me queerly, and she scented danger. She backed up my play with her best trump cards, enlightening me deftly as to things I should know about other people, and I took her pointers and enlarged upon them.

But the thing that stumped Sears was her continual reference to our doings at Bath Beach the previous summer. Sam knew that I had been in New York City all last summer, except for three weeks spent at a resort in New Jersey. It was clear that I could not have been in two places so distant at one time. It was also evident that the young clergyman who resembled his friend so strikingly was an old acquaintance of Miss Apthorpe's. Sears was beside himself. Clever as he is, he could not make it out.

Then they began a theological discussion and I was right on deck; I had learned my lesson.

No more heresy for me; I couldn't afford the luxury. To even things up and make myself solid with these pillars of the Episcopal Church I was so orthodox that I fairly smelled of sulphur and brimstone. I was for fore-ordination, predestination and even ventured to postulate infant damnation. I condemned the population of the globe from the creation of man to the Christian era to eternal torments. Buddha, Confucius, Aristotle, Socrates, Epictetus and all the rest of them I sent to swim in the boiling lake. I reduced the number of the elect to the smallest possible minimum. I thinned out the population of paradise until it was no bigger than that of the village of Greenford. When I had finished my forecast of the census on the day of judgment there were hardly enough saints left to make a respectable procession at a masonic funeral.

Sears began to perceive marked differences between me and his friend of the "Express," even in personal appearance. For one thing, he noticed that my nose was bigger and redder, so he told me afterwards. He liked Basil Plympton,

but the Rev. Charles Tupper was too bloodthirsty altogether.

That I was the Rev. Charles W. Tupper, of St. Luke's rectory, was established by proof irrefutable. There could be no question about it. Yet, barring my enlarged proboscis, I was Basil Plympton, of the New York "Express," to a hair. Could he refuse to credit the evidence of his own senses? Had we not met frequently during the last two years?

It was a hard proposition. All he could do was to watch and bide his time. While I was making good I fenced about warily to discover how Sam Sears, of all people, came to be a guest of the Aphorpes. The solution was not difficult.

Harry Fielding knew him well and had brought him to act as his best man; but the Aphorpes were evidently unaware of his newspaper affiliations. As the wedding was supposed to be strictly private, with all representatives of the press rigidly excluded, this maneuver on the part of Fielding was the worst sort of bad faith.

Incidentally it threw a side-light on the mys-

tery itself. The family had published the engagement far and wide, but wanted the wedding quiet and were going to bundle the bride and groom off to Europe immediately after. Fielding, on the other hand, wanted to keep the wedding and his movements afterward in the limelight.

Miss Apthorpe, it would seem, did not wish to be married at all, but was under some sort of compulsion and dared not openly rebel. Yet, if actually brought to the point she undoubtedly stood ready to back out at the last moment and to defy everybody.

The situation was peculiar in the extreme, but not so strange as to afford no rational explanation; and this she had promised to give me that evening. If I could only make my imposture hold its own with Sam Sears I might yet save the day.

Of the two of us, my position for the time being was the better assured. I knew him; he merely suspected me. Neither of us had any business to be where we were. I could expose him at will. He would find some difficulty in tearing off my

mask, even should he finally make up his mind that I wore one.

Nevertheless he could do much mischief, if he chose. A mere suspicion, a plausible doubt excited in the actor's mind would serve to make him set inquiries afoot and be fatal to Miss Apthorpe and myself. Sam Sears also would unquestionably make investigations on his own account.

Backed up by the young lady and the clergyman I had thought myself fairly secure for a few hours. I had not reckoned on Sam. He hadn't figured on me, either. He had fancied himself assured of the inside track for the "Gazette" in the Apthorpe matter, and now saw himself in danger of being shunted upon a siding, provided always Tupper wasn't Tupper, but Plympton.

At this crisis in my affairs Master Gosse tried his hand on me again. Master Gosse was the most dangerous logician for his size I had ever met. The ice was altogether too thin just then to risk another bout with that juvenile inquisi-

tor. I framed one comprehensive rejoinder to all his questions, and stuck to that as long as possible.

"Mr. Tupper, why can't hens fly like birds?" he demanded. I might have undertaken an instructive discourse on the hen with any other youngster, but I had learned my lesson and learned it well. I didn't dare. Some trap lurked in the simplest query. "Ask your mother about it, my young friend," I said, with my most clerical smile.

That kept him still for a moment. Then he sprang another. "Say, Mr. Tupper, is Beulahland in South America?"

"Your mother is an authority on Beulahland, my boy."

"Could God go skating on the Fourth of July if He wanted to?"

"Ask your mother."

"What makes one end of an egg smaller than the other?"

"Ask your mother."

Master Gosse wasn't accustomed to this sort

of a squelching, and eyed me revengefully. He bided his time and reflected. When he had thought of a question impossible to be disposed of by the maternal referendum, he produced it.

"Mr. Tupper," he said, "what makes a minister leave church by a back window when every one else goes out by the front door?"

That young scamp was one too many for me. He always came out on top, somehow. The others listened breathlessly for my reply. I couldn't say, "Ask your mother," for Mrs. Gosse evidently would have made the same inquiry of me had she dared. Sam Sears was all attention.

"It is not a customary thing to do, my child," I said, with fatherly tolerance, "but I learned a poor old woman was ill and I was in a hurry to make her a visit. If I had gone out the other way I should have been detained. I was late for lunch as it was."

"A poor old woman ill—who was it, pray?" inquired the kind-hearted Mrs. Apthorpe.

How did I know? I could have wrung the neck of that young Gosseling.



Beatrice pulled me out of the mire, as usual. "Old Mrs. Flannigan," she explained. "I met Mr. Tupper returning from his visit. She lives right over the hill, two miles from the church, you know."

"You are evidently going to be a friend to our sick and poor, Mr. Tupper. I shall have to forgive you for being tardy, after all," said Mrs. Apthorpe, with moist eyes.

Sears had been listening with marked attention; but after that he sank back in his chair and looked wilted. I had turned out such a saint that he was ashamed of himself.

"Mr. Tupper," began Master Gosse again, and a cold shiver went down my spine. Mrs. Gosse, however, now awoke to the fact that I was being annoyed and put a stop to the persecution. I didn't say, "Never mind, he's a bright child," or anything like that. I knew better.

But Sam Sears had been collecting his wits and now unmasked his batteries and opened fire. "Mr. Tupper," he queried, "do you happen to know a man named Basil Plympton?"

"Of the New York 'Express'?"

"The same."

"Slightly; by reputation only. Do you?"

"I did—once."

"I have had a number of requests from various newspapers for permission to send men here," put in Apthorpe. "I have advised them all that the marriage is purely a private matter, and that the public is not concerned with it in any way."

"Not in the least degree," observed Fielding pompously.

"We must look out that none of these cattle presume to intrude upon our privacy," remarked Apthorpe.

"They are very persistent fellows," observed Gosse. "I think one of them was at church this morning. He eyed us all with the impudent and vulgar curiosity of his calling."

"You don't say so!" cried his wife in alarm.

"Awful!" exclaimed Beatrice, with a roguish side glance at me.

"What kind of a looking fellow was he?" asked

Samuel Sears, who was evidently very uncomfortable.

"He wore a loud jacket and carried a slouch hat," replied Gosse. "I recognized him for a reporter by his nervous air and peculiarly irreverent aspect. He can seldom have been inside of a church; he scowled at our good divine all through the sermon."

Poor Tupper! How clothes and environment do make the man. And he thought these good people would receive him as a genuine parson after that!

"I'll have the gardener instructed to put him out if he dares intrude here," snorted Apthorpe.

"If you mean the man who sat at the back of the church," ventured Miss Beatrice Apthorpe, "I think I recognized him."

"Who was he?" asked her father.

"Basil Plympton, of the New York 'Express,'" declared that veracious young lady.

Sears upset a glass of water at his elbow. His clumsiness was really most annoying.

"How did you happen to know him, dear?" asked her mother.

"I have often seen his picture in magazine articles on dramatic criticism, and he has been pointed out to me. That was two years ago, though; he may have changed."

"How did he look, the man in the church?" inquired Samuel.

"He had a long nose and a pale face," replied the daring Miss Apthorpe. Why could she not leave well enough alone? She was very clever, but sometimes cleverness overreaches itself.

"I did not notice that," said Gosse. "On the contrary, I thought him rather fat and flabby."

Sam pricked up his ears again. The discrepancies were too perceptible. Not only this, but the girl had drawn his suspicions upon her. If she was in the deal it was very plain that I would have no trouble in mystifying all the rest. I knew Sam Sears to be shrewd enough to miss no obvious pointer like that. It was essential to carry the war into Africa. That young man was looking for trouble.

"Speaking of resemblances," I said slowly, so that all present should fix their attention upon him, "a man was pointed out to me not long ago as being a prominent newspaper writer who strongly reminded me of you, Mr. Sears."

The blow was unexpected and right from the shoulder. Sears winced, shook his head and gave me a beseeching look. He suddenly appreciated that, were his suspicions well founded, I still had the upper hand of him and could have him expelled with but scant ceremony, if I but said the word.

I did not want to do that; it was risky. He would be sure to retaliate. Besides, it wasn't professional ethics. I merely thought to show my hand sufficiently to shut him up for a season, and it worked very well. For the rest of the meal Sammy was the nicest, the politest, the most quiet and subdued man you ever saw. But the question was: "How long would he remain like that?"

The meal came to an end and the entire party adjourned to the veranda. I engaged Fielding in

conversation and soon sized him up for the matinee-girl-favorite type I had thought him. Yet he was a man of parts in a superficial and social way, and one of a peculiarly engaging personality. He reminded me strongly of Steerforth, in "David Copperfield."

He was a big, handsome chap, just the sort to attract a young girl; especially one who loved fun. He was bright in his talk, and told stories cleverly.

I had several plans revolving in my head. To work them out properly it would be necessary for me to break away from the assembled company for an hour or so. I maneuvered a little and managed to whisper to Beatrice Apthorpe: "I must go to the station at once. Do not fear, I am going to stand by you. I do not need watching any more."

She made some excuse and re-entered the house. A moment later I followed. She piloted me to a side door, whence I could reach the road without coming into view.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Only a little work on the wires," I replied.



## CHAPTER X

### THE GARMENT OF BETRAYAL

On the way to the station I met the Rev. Charles W. Tupper wandering about the country like a disembodied spirit, with an air so dejected and a face so forlorn that I felt acutely sorry for him.

“Hello!” I cried. “Cheer up. Your innings is soon coming.”

“It’s all well enough for you to talk, but if you were in my place you wouldn’t think it so much fun,” responded the dominie. He was right; I was having all the excitement. I had no time to think about things or to suffer from ennui. Up to date my vacation had been a glittering success, and I was enjoying it hugely.

But to be robbed of your identity and to be unable to regain it when you want to is a trying experience. I went through it later and know whereof I speak. The hour was to come when I

would have given, for a brief but vivid interval, all I had or hoped for, to be recognized and identified for my true self by some respectable authority.

"How are you coming out?" he asked.

"It's pretty hard sledding," I confessed. "Fielding brought up a newspaper chap with him as best man, and I am afraid there are drifts ahead."

"Does he know you?"

"He knows Basil Plympton like a brother, but as yet he is a bit perplexed about me. We are all on thin ice, though, and it may give way under our feet any moment."

The young parson seemed frightened. "Let's drop it and both go back to New York to-night," he said.

"I would have agreed to that gladly enough up on the hill this noon," I replied, "but you wouldn't have it that way. Now it is too late. I have given the young lady my word of honor to remain."

"But what are you going to do about the other



newspaper fellow? He will be sure to recognize you sooner or later, and then he will expose us. I wish I had never let you go back."

"That is hind-sight. We can't help it now."

"Easily enough; chloroform him, perhaps."

The young minister started. "Oh, don't do that!" he cried.

He seemed so "easy" I couldn't resist the temptation to "string" him a bit.

"But how will you dispose of your rival?"

"Oh, I won't hurt him," I said, with becoming gravity. "He is nervous. A narcotic would have a soothing effect, and would do him a world of good. We have to work all sorts of tricks in our trade, you know."

"I am sure there is some better way," said the cleric with a twinkle in his eye.

"Well, we'll see," I admitted. "If things are going slow and you want some real excitement, think up a scheme yourself. I'll lure him to the back garden gate late this evening, and we'll find some method of putting him out of harm's way."

"I will try to think of something," he promised.

"All right, if you care to bother," I replied carelessly.

"But won't it make trouble if we do anything to him at all?"

"Trouble? Make trouble? My dear fellow, if we put this thing through to a finish and escape the electric-chair we are lucky."

He laughed at that, and I supposed he saw that I was merely joking and had no real intention of doing mischief to Mr. Sears.

"Keep cheerful," I added, as we parted. "When it's all over, I'll make you famous. This morning's sermon will be published in the 'Express' anyhow—your part of it, that is."

He went off with his face all aglow. He had his ambitions, and the mere suggestion of seeing himself in print seemed to add three inches to his stature.

I entered the station and made friends with the ticket-agent, who was also the telegraph-operator.

I sent a message and fee to Haskin & Hall, leading criminal lawyers of Boston. It read:

"Advise effect of marriage solemnized by unauthorized party. Is it criminal offense? Is the marriage binding? Wire full particulars." I signed Tupper's name to that telegram.

Then I wired Carl Krull at Hilltown: "Come to Greenford on nine fifty-five train to-morrow. Have discovered authoress of play. Go to Apthorpe residence. Inquire for Rev. Charles W. Tupper, of St. Luke's rectory. No matter what I say or do, call me by that name only. Will explain later."

Carl was a great success in his own line, but was ultra-German, and often thickheaded in other matters. Before the wedding I wanted to have a talk with him. He knew Fielding had brought him to the front, and was now his manager. If any man on earth could control the actor that man was Carl Krull. At any rate, he would be anxious to meet Beatrice Apthorpe and secure the right to produce her play.

In all this it never occurred to me what a box I was nailing myself into.

As I left the station I stepped right into the

arms of Sam Sears. He started guiltily. He also had designs on the telegraph-operator, but he didn't want me around while he was making agonized inquiries concerning a certain young clergyman and his whereabouts.

"Basil Plympton, you are a dandy!" It was in this rude vernacular that Samuel saw fit to accost me. It hurt my clerical dignity.

"Sir!" I said, with an indignant stare.

"Oh, let up, old man! Do you think that I am a fool?"

"I really do not understand you, brother."

"Call me sister," facetiously suggested Mr. Sears.

"My dear young man, you talk very strangely."

Seeing that his unseemly mirth was not to be checked by my art of meek forbearance and that the man really thought me funny, I turned my back upon him in disgust and walked away with the pompous stride of offended dignity.

"Wait," he called after me. "I was going to

wire for certain information; but I don't need it now."

We walked on for half a mile in silence. I was thinking hard. I had made up my mind to stick to my disguise, if possible. Sam Sears might suspect all he pleased. As long as he wasn't cock-sure he would hold his tongue and await developments.

"To think of it!" he resumed. "Preaching a sermon, actually holding forth from the pulpit. Basil, weren't you afraid the lightning might be sent down from heaven and destroy you in your blasphemy?"

"How long is this sort of thing to continue?" I asked, with some show of irritation. Then I bethought myself and treated him to a look full of forgiveness and brotherly love.

"You will be the death of me with that bland, clerical smile of yours, Basil," he cried, doubling up with convulsive merriment.

There was nothing for it but to walk on and ignore his jibes, but I had a very unclerical im-

pulse to kick him. It would have given me a lot of satisfaction just then.

He stumbled on up the hill after me, all out of breath and chuckling to himself without a let-up.

Another half-mile was passed in this fashion.

"See here, Basil Plympton," he said at length, "we must come to some understanding, make some agreement. I'd be willing to let you alone, if you would not interfere with me. But I can't let you go on to the point of officiating at the wedding. You are perfectly capable of doing it and then writing it up afterwards. Can't you see what a mess you are getting into?"

Still I smiled upon him in placid disdain. I was very anxious to draw him out and learn his views.

"You have fooled the Apthorpes," he continued, "you have managed to trick a poor parson out of his own identity and hide him away where he can't be found. You have bamboozled a whole churchful of people. You have hypnotized Miss Apthorpe. But it won't go. I was

puzzled; I might have been fooled altogether but for one thing. Basil, I may not know you, even now. But my dear boy, *I know your trousers!*"

Oh, my trousers, my conspicuous London trousers, they had betrayed me! Sam was right. The game was up. I acknowledged the fact with a sickly grin. Sam Sears did not suspect merely. He knew!

"Hush," I whispered, and looked about in alarm, but we were alone.

"Never fear, old man, we'll work this thing up together. I won't bother you so long as you agree to bring a genuine parson before to-morrow noon."

"Oh, that's all attended to; he is coming," I assured him.

"Then you did not propose to marry them yourself?"

"Not a bit of it."

"You are capable of anything—anything whatever."

"You flatter. Tupper was ill and let me come in his place. Miss Apthorpe understands. A

genuine, unadulterated article is to be imported for the occasion to-morrow. I shall only assist."

"Who is the real thing?"

"The Rev. Hogarth Applethwaite, of Hallam Manor, Devonshire."

"An Englishman?"

"Sounds like it."

"Friend of Tupper's?"

"Of course."

"Does Fielding know him?"

"He will be able to satisfy Mr. Fielding."

"Look here, Plympton. This is all rather queer. I want things to be right. What's up?"

Sam Sears was a hard man to fool, as he had already demonstrated. He was fast driving me into a corner. I dared not confide in him. He was Harry Fielding's friend even more than mine, and would stand by the actor through thick and thin in this affair. He was indeed a thorn in the flesh. I could not trust him and I could not deceive him successfully. All I could do was to play for time and trust to luck.

"There is a lot to this business that you are not



"I'll meet me  
this evening, and I'll give you s  
about."

He had to be satisfied with  
rapidly approaching Burgmoor  
his fiancée were standing under  
of the gate. They did not look  
couple.

She was talking rapidly and g  
hemently. He was shaking his h  
making a last vain appeal for mer  
looked like it, and my heart went

As we joined them she dropp  
me, leaving Sam Sears and the  
groom to walk on together. So  
girl's face told me that she ---

"What's the matter? Don't worry; I'll fix him," I said, nodding toward Sears.

"Oh, he doesn't count now; we are lost anyway," she whispered.

"What has happened?"

"The bishop is here."

"The bishop?"

"Yes, Bishop Hungerford."

"Hungerford? I know him. A dear old man. Most eighty and near-sighted. I interviewed him once."

"Worse and worse. But it doesn't matter. He knows Mr. Tupper. What shall we do?"

"What's he here for?"

"Mr. Dobbs and the wardens say your sermon was heresy; heresy of the worst, most virulent kind. It was the first part, your part, the part I liked."

"The idiots! How did they happen to lay their hands on the bishop so soon?"

"He was confirming a class at Highfield and they drove over for him. Oh, they are up in arms about it, I can tell you!"

"What's the fuss, anyhow? What sacred doctrine have I denied, I should like to know?"

"It's the resurrection of the body. They claim you dispute that. They declare you have struck a blow against the foundations of the Church and of the Christian religion. They are having a great scene over it on the veranda. Papa has been trying to take your side, but Bishop Hungerford is against you."

"Humph."

"Poor Mr. Tupper!"

"It *is* rough on Tupper. I am afraid it is all up with us, but I must stand by Tupper and defend his views of theology as I have expounded them."

"You will be exposed, and we shall all be disgraced. I'd almost prefer to marry Mr. Fielding and be done with it. But he has been horrid to me. Things seem to be growing more complicated every minute. Can't you think of something?"

"Don't worry. Keep up your courage. If I

could fool Sam Sears for half an hour I can pull the wool over the eyes of the bishop, I imagine. I'll chance it, anyhow."

"Mr. Sears knows you, then? I feared he recognized you at dinner, but thought we convinced him by our talk."

"We did, and all would have gone well if he hadn't recognized my trousers."

"They are a bit—well, gay. For a minister, I mean, of course," she said, looking down upon their gaudy splendors demurely.

"Gay—they are loud; they shriek unto the hilltops; the Berkshires echo with the racket."

As we came in sight of the veranda, we stopped talking. From an animated group there assembled loud voices greeted us.



## CHAPTER XI

### THE BISHOP

Mr. Dobbs was laying down the law while Mr. Gosse and Mr. Apthorpe were protesting. The bishop was evidently much disturbed, his shaggy eyebrows being drawn over his kind old eyes. Two pompous-looking Berkshire farmers were putting in a word now and then to back up Dobbs, who was sweeping all before him.

We walked up the steps just behind Fielding and Sam Sears, who had been waiting for us.

The minute he saw the bishop Sears knew that I was up against it, and he gave me a grin of commiseration. He evidently thought I was done for, and he was glad of it. He just stood apart from the crowd to enjoy things all by himself.

Now, if I had been a genuine minister I should have been frightened half to death. It was pretty

rough treatment to pile the bishop and the wardens on me the very first Sunday, and haul me over the coals for heresy before my sermon was cold. As I wasn't subject to be fried upon the ecclesiastical griddle personally, the whole thing amused me immensely. But it came home to me as never before how very careful a parson has to be, and why he can't afford to talk too much. If every young man was at liberty to start a new schism there would be nearly as many churches as there are people to go to them. That grain of mustard-seed of mine seemed to be working.

It wasn't my doctrine that bothered me. The question was, Would the bishop recognize me for the fraud I really was, or would he endorse my assumed identity?

I walked right up to the old gentleman with extended hand, and asked feelingly after his health.

The bishop shook my hand and looked up into my face. Then he took off his glasses, slowly polished them with his handkerchief, put them on carefully and looked at me again. Every one was

silent while the bishop was peering at me. Perhaps he wanted to see how a real live young heretic looked.

He folded up his pince-nez and took out a leather case. From this he extracted his long-distance spectacles and put them on. The result was no more satisfactory. Then he tried on the eye-glasses at the end of his nose beyond the spectacles. They must have obscured his vision sufficiently, for a smile of recognition spread over his face. I do not believe he could see me at all, through all that glass, but he wouldn't own up to it.

"I am in good health, my dear young friend," he said at length, "but my eyesight is growing very poor. You must have been ill. You have changed terribly since I saw you last. You must have lost twenty pounds, and your face is sadly emaciated."

"I have been ill. That is why I am very glad to be transferred from New York to your diocese. I have been working quite hard. It ran into insomnia; and the city air is bad for my

lungs, which have been troubling me of late."

"I know," nodded the old gentleman. "These city parishes make heavy demands upon our young shepherds."

"What is the matter, Mr. Sears?" asked Mrs. Apthorpe of Samuel, who was evidently stirred by some invisible impulse and was writhing convulsively. "Are you ill? You seem to be in pain."

"No, madam," gasped Sam. "It is nothing. I—I—Excuse me, I'll—I'll take a short walk."

Sam Sears was possessed of the idea that there was something funny in my talk with the good old bishop and that it was all done exclusively for his personal amusement. That man never had any reverence.

I had no time to bother with him. I was busy. The worst was over so far as the bishop was concerned. My identity as the Rev. Charles W. Tupper was more firmly established than ever.

But Dobbs and the wardens were after me relentlessly. They were bound to lay me low, pull me down and trample on me. Dobbs took a mali-



cious satisfaction in making things just as disagreeable for the new minister as he knew how. He began his onslaught by quoting my introductory discourse with more or less accuracy. He then proceeded to show that I had asserted the perishability of the body, that it would be left behind and the soul struggle along without it. Also, that I had asserted that the soul was a thing entirely apart from it, and was merely manifested through its medium. That I had therefore denied absolutely a bodily resurrection as laid down in the Apostle's creed.

"I didn't say all that," I urged in defense. "I merely intimated that the whole is no greater than the sum of all its parts, a proposition which is pretty good mathematics, anyhow. All I claimed was that if the soul did not reside in one hand or one eye that had gone, it could not dwell in the other hand or the other eye which remained."

"That's just our complaint, bishop," put in one of the farmers, a shrewd, orthodox old Yankee. "This here young chap has come up from the city

into our hills to tell us that the hull ain't no greater when it *is hull*, than when it's all busted up inter smithereens. When I cut down a tree and split it up into a pile of kindlin's, that cord of wood ain't no tree."

I was about to retort. The illustration was just what I wanted, but the bishop held up his hand. The young parson was there to listen to his elders, not to convert them to his personal notions about things. I would very much like to work an elaboration of my ideas in here, seeing how I was shut off there, but perhaps it would be better to write them up in a separate paper and send it to Dobbs, the wardens and Bishop Hungerford. They might read it and you wouldn't.

Well, the good old man stopped the dispute right there. "My dear friends," he said, "when young Mr. Tupper has grown in thought and in grace, he will come to see that what may be good mathematics is poor theology. The whole is greater than its parts, when the tree we speak of is the tree of life. It holds the germ of a whole forest. There is the mystery, the mystery

of infinity. It dwells in the acorn as well as in the oak. It dwells in the fowls of the air and the creatures of the deep as well as in man. Everywhere, all about us, without and within, there is the mystery of the infinite."

Then that simple-hearted Christian gentleman preached us a sermon there on the veranda such as I had never heard before on the stateliest occasions and from the most exalted pulpits.

He defended all the theological dogmas that young men of the day decry, when they bother their heads about them at all. He yielded not one jot nor one tittle of the good old faith. I didn't agree with him at all; but he soothed us all down and quenched the fires of debate with the dignity and power of his presence and the lofty grace of his language.

The bishop was all right; I liked him first-rate. When he had finished with me I felt just as small and cheap as though I had been stealing something and had been caught at it. If I had not been caught of course I should have had no feelings on the subject. So I recanted cheerfully

anything heretical which might have been inferred from what I had said. That was all the old gentleman wanted, and it made me solid with him. It was probably the shortest and least sensational heresy-trial that ever took place. If I accomplished nothing else while I was in the ministry, at least I made a new record for heresy-trials.

"What is the matter with that man?" asked Gosse, pointing to where Sam Sears lay rolling over and over under a tree, out on the lawn, in full view of all of us.

"Henry," called Apthorpe to the gardener, who was working on the flower-beds near by, "go and see if our guest yonder is ill."

Henry went and returned with a grin on his face. He came up to the front steps and touched his hat. "Please, sir," he said, "Mr. Sears, he ain't got nothin' the matter with him. He's laughin'."

"Laughing?"

"Yes, sir, he says as how he had a tooth extracted yesterday and they gave him an overdose

of laughing gas. He says it breaks out on him sudden like, and he has got to go off by hisself and work it out of his system. He do seem to have taken a powerful lot o' that gas."

Sam was rapidly disgracing himself beyond redemption. I was ashamed of him. Fielding, who was responsible for him, looked very uncomfortable. The guest whom he had introduced into this select household had certainly been acting in a very original manner all the afternoon.

He had jumped around, choked in his soup and upset things at lunch. He had stared at me, the parson, with offensive impertinence, and now he had seen fit to yield himself up to a fit of hysterics before the eyes of the bishop and the wardens of the church, to say nothing of its minister and its lay-reader.

If the bishop was satisfied with the result of his examination into my doctrinal soundness, Mr. Dobbs was proportionately disappointed. His small and jealous soul still sought opportunity to ruin the new minister.

He had supposed that the bishop would un-

frock me on the spot for my extreme heresy; and when he found that I was to escape with merely a mild reproof, his chagrin and indignation knew no bounds.

"But, sir," he protested to the bishop, " he was not only wrong in his theology, he was disrespectful to holy things. He wiped his face on the surplice. I saw him do it."

The good old bishop frowned. He did not like Dobbs any better than I did, though he had felt it his duty to back him up. He had not lived to nearly four-score years without learning more or less about human nature and its manifold frailties.

"I did make a mistake," I said maliciously. "The surplice was very dusty and badly soiled, as I found to my sorrow. I wanted to make sure it would go to the wash, but it was a sad mistake to wipe my face with it."

That sally tickled the bishop in his secret soul, though he did not smile. He was glad of one good chance to get after the obstreperous lay-reader.

"How is this, Mr. Dobbs?" he inquired, frowning upon that now quailing worthy until his shaggy eyebrows met over his nose. "Is this not a case of the mote and the beam?"

"It was an oversight, sir. Mrs. Flannigan, the laundress, has been quite ill," mumbled the lay-reader.

"So we learned from Mr. Tupper, who hurried to see her right after church," cried Apthorpe, glad to squelch Dobbs and put in a good word for his guest at the same time.

"Humph," snorted the lay-reader, "he must have traveled in an airship at the rate of about forty miles a minute, then. She was removed to a hospital at Pittsfield yesterday."

"So I learned when I inquired for her," I said with my blindest and most forgiving smile.

"You must have heard it from burglars," retorted Dobbs, "for the house is closed."

"She was the finest-looking burglar I ever saw," I assented. I had to stick to my guns even if I invented a whole family in the course of the argument.

"Her daughter has returned, of course," said Beatrice Apthorpe. "She is said to be very pretty. I see you have an eye for our Berkshire lasses, Mr. Tupper. You will have to keep a sharp watch on him, Mr. Dobbs. Look out for Sally Henderson in the choir, she may need your protection."

"Of course it was her daughter," said the bishop.

Then everybody else said "Of course" in chorus, and looked upon the lay-reader in scorn. Even the two farmers turned their backs on him. They had stood by him in his nonsense about my heresy. When it came to an issue of fact, in which I was quite wrong and he was entirely in the right, they struck their colors and deserted. That is the way of the world.

Meanwhile Gosse, Apthorpe and Fielding had been whispering together. They now came forward and invited the bishop to remain and officiate at the marriage-service on the morrow. They knew Mr. Tupper wouldn't mind.

Beatrice gasped and turned very pale. Just



as we had rounded all the roughest corners her whole scheme fell through.

One thing that struck me as very peculiar was the fact that none of the men thought it necessary or desirable to ask what her pleasure was in the matter. She was not being treated with much consideration; that was clear. But what girl wouldn't prefer to be married by a bishop, if she had the chance?

I was sure it was the work of Sam Sears. He must have dropped some sort of a hint to Fielding. I learned afterwards that he had whispered to the actor that it would look better in print to have the bishop's name mentioned in connection with the affair. Sears intended no harm, perhaps, but he was a nuisance. He had made trouble for me all the afternoon.

The new arrangement about the wedding did not worry me as much as it did Miss Apthorpe. I had already formed a plan for getting the good old bishop out of the way. On the whole, had it not been for Sam Sears, I should have felt pretty safe and taken my first easy breath for several

hours. Just as I had everybody nicely set to rights in this Apthorpe business something always happened to set my teeth on edge again. I had triumphed completely. Every prospect was pleasing, and only Dobbs and his wardens wore no smile. But they were about to depart.

Just then Beatrice Apthorpe seized me by the arm and pointed up the road. "Look!" she cried.

And well I might look. The Rev. Charles W. Tupper, alias Basil Plympton, was coming down the hill at a hot pace, grim determination on his face. He turned in at the gateway under the rustic arch, and came toward us. Evidently he had heard of the bishop's visit to Burgmoor, and, believing it all up with me, had come to help explain things and resume his lost place in the world.

I could see that he had serious misgivings about what was going to happen to him; but I could see also that he had resolved to confess and lay the whole case before the bishop. When he looked up at the veranda and saw us all sitting there, calm and peaceful and happy, good faith

required him to retreat at once. But he was mad clear through because I was hobnobbing with the bishop instead of his doing so. I could not very well blame him; he had been losing chances of distinction all day.

The case was one, however, which justified extreme measures on my part. I waited until he was in full view of every one as he came up the walk. Then I pointed to him and asked Mr. Gosse if that wasn't the reporter he had seen in church that morning.

"That is the chap, sure enough," he replied.

"The same man!" cried Beatrice Apthorpe.

"Perhaps he wants to interview Bishop Hungerford," I suggested, "and while he is doing it pick up some gossip about the wedding."

That was like a red rag to a bull. Apthorpe arose in his might. "Henry," he shouted, "tell that fellow he isn't wanted here and lead him off the premises! Pay no attention to what he says. Just put him out. I won't have any of those rascals around."

Before poor Tupper came within speaking

distance or close enough for the near-sighted old bishop to have a good look at his face, the faithful and muscular gardener took him by the arm and led him away.

I could see that the dominie was inclined to argue the point. But Henry was mindful of his orders and deaf to all persuasion, and the much-abused young parson was summarily ejected.

It was hard luck for him; I did not blame him for feeling sore. It was good luck for me, though, and he couldn't blame me, either. It was a close call; but once more we had saved the day by a narrow margin.



## CHAPTER XII

### ENTANGLEMENTS

When Sam Sears stepped into my room to chat a few moments before dinner, he seemed in a mirthful mood.

"All right," I said, "have your laugh out. Wash all of that gas out of your system before you go downstairs. I should like to see you go through one meal without choking in your soup."

"Well, Plympton, I'll try to mend my ways, only don't crowd me too hard. Give me a pointer in advance now and then so I can know what to look for. It's these continual surprises you spring that upset a fellow."

"Did I not tell you I was going to have a high dignitary of the church on hand to do the wedding? What is the use of giving you a pointer, if you can't take it?"

"You gave me some talk about an English-

man. Do you mean to say you meant the bishop?"

"It was between him and Bishop Hungerford. I wired both; the bishop came."

"Come now, do you mean to say you sent for the bishop yourself?"

"Certainly. Why not?"

"It didn't look like it. Is that what you were going to tell me this evening?"

"Not at all. There is more to this thing than you have any notion. I'll put you onto all the fine points as soon as I have a fair chance. Meet me at half past ten to-night at the back gate in the garden. I'll tell you a few things that will awaken you. We will take in some of this fine hill-country air and have a good talk."

With that we went down. I hadn't the least notion what cock-and-bull story I could prepare for him. There was plenty of time to make one up between seven and ten-thirty, provided my inventive powers were equal to the emergency. When I came to think of it I had undertaken a big contract, and meanwhile other duties were

of pressing importance. In fact my inventive powers had been stretched to high tension all day long. The first day of my vacation had been a pretty lively one so far.

The evening meal was the easiest of all. The bishop held the center of the stage, asked the blessing, led the conversation and answered the questions of young Master Howard Gosse with skill and suavity. Beatrice Apthorpe's eyes were red from weeping and her pretty face was so utterly downcast I could hardly stand it. However foolish her plan might seem, one thing was certain: she had rather die than marry Fielding, and with the advent of the good old bishop had given herself up to despair. Whether or not I carried my rôle of impostor to the point of performing a mock marriage, I resolved to get the kind old gentleman out of Burgmoor without unnecessary delay.

The task was not so difficult as it might appear at first thought. I turned the conversation upon things dramatic, and soon developed the fact that the bishop had a holy horror of the stage

and of everything pertaining thereto. It was clear that he was ignorant of Fielding's profession. The Aphorpes had not seen fit to enlighten him.

I supplied the omission with apparent innocence. The bishop started, frowned, and bent a glance of the utmost curiosity on the real, live actor. He seemed astonished to find such a specimen actually eating in peace like any other mortal. I could see that the benevolent old man was much disturbed within himself, though he made no sign while I drew Fielding on to converse about topics theatrical.

This all took time and I let it gradually have its effect. That was but the first move. Then I began to talk about newspapers and how the representatives of the press were haunting the vicinity.

"I am so glad you happened over here," I said to Bishop Hungerford. "A man of your exalted station does not mind having his picture published in every newspaper in New York City. It would be embarrassing for a young clergyman.



Evil-minded persons might insinuate that he was seeking notoriety."

"Dear me, you don't say there is any likelihood of such publicity?" said the bishop in extreme annoyance.

"Nonsense," said Mr. Apthorpe, frowning and shaking his head at me; "nothing of the sort. We have kept the affair most private. I have refused a dozen applications to have reporters present at the ceremony."

The remark was unfortunate from his point of view. It didn't serve to soothe the bishop.

"One of them was put off the grounds this afternoon," I reminded that excellent prelate.

The bishop said nothing more, but I could see that my shot had hit the bull's-eye. Immediately after dinner he laid his hand heavily on my arm and asked me to take a turn with him in the garden.

"I do not know how I can thank you, my young brother, for your timely warning," he said with much agitation. "I would not do anything

that would bring my name, much less my picture, into the papers in this way for worlds. I am much perplexed. I should not have been deceived into such a position."

"It is easily avoided, if you wish it," I ventured.

"How?"

"Oh, it can be arranged so you can escape from the situation without hurting the feelings of any one. As I said at the table, it would be embarrassing, even for a young man; not alone the publicity, but the apparent sanction it gives to the evils of the stage."

The good bishop's hand trembled as it rested on my arm. I was really sorry for him.

"What excuse can I make?" he asked desperately. "These excellent people are of high standing and give largely of their worldly goods to the needs, the pressing needs of the Church, and the poor of the Church who are always with us."

"They did not dream that you would accept when they asked you," I asserted. "They would have requested you to come in the first place and

not an unknown young man like me had they hoped for your sanction."

"But what shall I do? I can think of nothing that does not savour of duplicity, and it is too late for me to begin deception at my time of life. It is a cross, but perhaps I must bear it."

I did not want to have him think that he was going to have an easy chance to martyr himself. "You are too old and have suffered too much to take fresh burdens meant for younger shoulders," I suggested. I didn't know just what he had suffered, but one couldn't live to that age without enduring a great deal first and last. "Leave it all to me," I added; "you are not to blame if some one else deceives you."

He looked at me rather doubtfully. He didn't like to have his young men so fertile in expedients which smacked of worldly cunning. But he was in sore straits, and finally decided to let things take their course. If he was not required to fall from grace himself, well, young men would be young men, whether ordained or not.

I cast no reflections on the bishop. He was one

of the best and kindest old gentlemen I have ever had the good fortune to meet. After all, I was a wolf in sheep's clothing, and tempted him.

On parting from the perplexed prelate I took a walk to the village tavern. There I found Tupper, half beside himself. The poor young fellow had lost ten pounds by the nerve-wear of that dreadful day. It did him good; he had been too stout before.

Tupper was very angry with me, for he guessed rightly that I was at the bottom of his ejection from the Apthorpe premises. I soon convinced him, however, that it would have been fatal to us both had he appeared on the scene.

When I told him how I had outfaced and outmaneuvered Dobbs and his lieutenants, his brow cleared. And when I disclosed the fashion in which we were to dispose of Bishop Hungerford he laughed heartily and joined in the scheme with a right good will. Anything was justifiable in his eyes, now that the bishop had tacitly approved.

By means of a substantial bribe we secured the services of a shrewd, close-mouthed native. He

was to deliver a letter addressed to the bishop at Burgmoor. All he had to say was that he had driven over from the neighboring town of Highfield and was ready to drive the bishop back there, if that prelate cared to go. The missive called the bishop to the bedside of a friend who was very ill and thought to be dying.

On my walk back to Burgmoor, I met the bishop driving away at a fast trot. I glided into the underbrush on one side of the road. I did not wish to detain him or give him any chance to repent.

When I passed the gate I met Henry, the gardener, who was looking very important. He had a shot-gun in his hand and was peering up and down the road. He was out gunning for newspaper correspondents. I hoped he would wing one. He greeted me very pleasantly.

Further on I met Beatrice Apthorpe, now wreathed in smiles. She seized my hand with both of hers and looked up at me admiringly.

"How clever you are!" she cried. "You have saved me. You have saved my life. How can I

ever thank you enough? How neatly you did it. Father and Mr. Gosse are in a fury. Harry Fielding is beside himself. They all think there is a trick, but they can't quite see through it. They believe you managed it some way in order to get your own name into the papers! I came to warn you not to go in just now. Father is so angry he might ask embarrassing questions. He will cool off by morning. Mr. Fielding, Mr. Sears, my sister and Mr. Gosse have gone for a short drive. They invited me to join them, but I didn't care to go."

I told her that a little trick like that wasn't worth talking about. I said I was not at all proud of it, and would never have done it save from force of circumstances. "I am not half as clever as you," I added.

"I?"

"Yes, Miss Apthorpe. Some time ago I had the pleasure of reading a production from your pen which proves you a very able woman."

"What—what do you mean?" She had flushed red and then turned very pale.

“Your play, you know, ‘Diamonds Lead, but Hearts are Trumps.’ ”

At that, to my astonishment, she threw up her hands and fell fainting into my arms.

We were in a secluded part of the garden or I should have had a bees’ nest about my devoted head in a trice.

I chafed her wrists and her temples, and she soon revived. If you wish to keep from falling in love with a young woman toward whom you are attracted by powerful influences and from whom you are repelled by every dictate of honour and common sense, don’t let her faint in your arms in a rose-garden on a warm July evening. If fate puts you in that situation, lay her gently down and summon help. Don’t play doctor and nurse yourself.

“What is the matter, dear?” I asked, the word of caress falling from my lips so naturally that I was scarcely conscious of it; but then, I’ll never tell all the restoratives I applied.

“Nothing,” she said, opening her bright eyes, but making no effort to abandon my support.

"Nothing; only I dreamed you said you had found it."

"Found what?"

"The play, my lost, stolen manuscript—the only proof I had of my innocence."

"My dear child, calm yourself. Your words are wild and without meaning. Think a moment; just reason about it."

"I am all right, Mr. Plympton," she said. "You are kind and chivalrous. You do not understand, that is all."

"It's very perplexing," I confessed.

"You said something about reading my play, about having seen the manuscript. That fatal effort of mine is responsible for everything. If I had never written it; if I had never let it out of my hands, this hateful, this detestable marriage could not have been forced upon me."

We sat down on a bench, under an arbor of vines, and she asked me a number of questions in quick succession. Where was the manuscript now? When I told her it was in my room lodged safely in my grip, she clasped her hands



in triumph. "We may foil him yet," she said.

Then she wanted to know how the play had come into my possession. I told her about Carl Krull and of the opinion of the critics, including my own, which was now quite worthless as I had become too much biased in the matter to be any judge.

She did not seem at all surprised to know her play was well thought of by competent judges, or to learn that Krull was eager to meet the authoress and to arrange for putting her drama on the stage.

"I have known all that from the moment I wrote it," she said with the calm of perfect assurance, yet without a trace of egotism. "Believe me, I do not care if it is never acted. I do not care if it is lauded to the skies. I would not go across the street to see it presented. I have been caused such utter misery through the manuscript of that play that I hate the very thought of it."

"Even now when your moment of triumph seems close at hand?"

"Even now, when the light seems breaking through the clouds. Can you not guess what agony it has been to me, can you not imagine to what a pass I must have been brought, to act as I have acted today, casting myself on the mercy of a total stranger, when I am apparently surrounded by every luxury, guarded by every protection that could surround, could guard any girl in this broad land?"

"Do you still look upon me as a perfect stranger?"

"Have you not seen that I liked you? We do not like strangers, and what is more we do not tell them so. And yet, we never spoke to each other until this morning. Liking isn't computed by the clock; it is measured by heart-throbs."

"If that is the way you figure it, Miss Ap—"

She held up her hand, with a pretty gesture of supplication and protest.

"If that is the way you count the length of our acquaintance," I said, "we must have known each other for years. My heart has been running like a millrace all day long."

"That is the way a woman counts the time, anyway," she said, arching that whimsical eyebrow of hers at me. "And I am going to prove it to you, by telling you my whole story and putting my entire trust in you. I will be guided absolutely by your advice, even if you decide, as my father and Mr. Gosse have done, that I must marry a man whom I can never regard with any feeling other than one of contempt and hatred."

"Perhaps I may be compelled to agree with them," I acknowledged gravely, as I felt the weight of the responsibility that was falling upon me. "It will be strange, though, if I do not see a better way."



## CHAPTER XIII

### ARTIFICE

The dusk was falling amid the crimsons of the after-glow, and the warm shade of the grape-vines shut us off from the rest of the world. Some moments stand out in bold relief against the background of half-remembered and half-forgotten incidents. I can see her now as she sat there by my side—close by my side, and can remember every movement of her restless little hands, every turn of her head, and each expression that passed over her mobile features. There was a look of trust in her eyes that set my heart athrob as I whispered: “Now for the whole story.”

“Did you ever see Mr. Fielding act?” she asked, inconsequentially, as I thought.

“Yes,” I replied, “and, frankly, the one great mystery to me is that a man of his sort could have

attracted a woman like you. The rest I might guess at, or, at least, make an attempt to surmise, but that passes my comprehension."

"Naturally," admitted the young lady demurely, "for, as a matter of fact, he never did attract me in the way you mean, not in the least degree."

I smiled, but made no other comment.

"You needn't look so incredulous," protested Batrice, with a *moue*, "for he never made the slightest impression upon me, of that sort, after the fashion of other girls, even in my own set, who showered him, last winter, with notes, flowers and invitations. But he did exert a powerful influence upon me, none the less. It was his art as a comedian, his exquisite sense of the ludicrous, his refined, yet telling humor, his delicate railery——"

"You must have seen him in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,' as Nick Bottom," I could not help suggesting.

"But not with the eyes of Titania," she persisted, with quick appreciation of the insinuation.

"I know you don't like him, I don't want you to, but you must at least concede him to be a clever actor."

"And yet again wonderful, out of all hooping," I rejoined.

"Don't be so terribly Shakespearian, and listen," she protested. "I, at all events, admired his talent, and it fired my imagination—served as an inspiration to attempt something in a humorous vein myself. I first saw Mr. Fielding at a *matinée*, which I attended with a school friend of mine, who had already made his personal acquaintance and urged me to see him. It was while enjoying his power of fun-making that afternoon, that the scheme of a play, full of dash and situation, just the sort of a comedy he could act well and make successful, popped into my head. I have never quite determined how much of the inspiration came from him and what proportion was latent in me."

"We will let the public be the final judge of that," I suggested.

"Anyway, I hurried home and began to write.

New turns to events, new developments to the characters and new subjects of ridicule poured in upon me, until in a few days my attempt grew into a four-act comedy which you have been good enough to praise."

"I liked it when I was in the position of an impartial critic, and I certainly haven't changed my mind since," I assured her. "I suppose it was the play that brought you Fielding's acquaintance?"

"I naturally turned to him to secure recognition, as he was the source of much of the inspiration there was in it. The friend who had taken me to see him act arranged an introduction at her home. I did not tell her about the play. I did not tell any one but Mr. Fielding about it. I wanted it kept a profound secret until it was accepted and produced."

"I can quite understand your feelings in the matter," I said.

"But others have not been as lenient. You see, my family are all rather practical. Not one of them ever attempted literary work, and they fail to appreciate how sensitive one might be

under such circumstances. But Mr. Fielding was all sympathy and appreciation when I told him about my effort and showed him the manuscript. He felt, or skilfully simulated, deep interest. We met alone and dined together several times while he went over the play with me and made corrections which I could see improved it immensely and lent the professional touches it lacked, which I could never have given it. When this had been done he took the manuscript and promised to place it in the hands of his manager. I have never seen it since."

"All this sounds harmless enough; how could it have led to your present difficulties?" I queried.

"It seemed entirely innocent and proper to me," rejoined Beatrice, "but it was very unconventional and I ought to have known better. I should, at the very least, have taken my mother into my confidence; but, as I once told you, I thought myself clever and able to take care of myself. I failed to appreciate in what an unfavorable light my conduct might be regarded by those who did not know all the facts."



"And did you talk of nothing but the play? Did you have no inkling of the actor's ulterior motives?" I could not forbear to ask.

"Ah, I know you will blame me," admitted Beatrice, with a slight flush. "Mr. Fielding, from the very first, affected to admire me, as well as my play, and said things of that sort, you know."

"I don't know."

"Oh, yes, you do. Things of the kind that most men say to most girls; but there was a theatrical flavor to it all, so I didn't pay much attention to it."

"You mean that you did not think him serious," I suggested.

"Why should I?" queried the young lady, with a trace of mischief.

"Why, indeed?" I exclaimed sententiously.

"Don't be absurd," she pleaded. "I really and truly did not suppose him more in earnest or sincere than many other men I have met who have talked to me in the same vein."

"Do you doubt us all like that?" I asked, with a touch of tender significance.

"I have had reason to," declared Miss Apthorpe. She didn't appear to me to be one who had so frequently been deceived and trifled with, so I didn't press the matter.

"Toward the last," she continued, "I began to appreciate that I had, perhaps, let affairs progress too far, in my interest in the comedy."

"Which comedy?"

"The play I had written; please don't be flip-pant. When I was at last forced to make him understand there could be nothing like that between us he grew so wild and desperate in his talk that I should have been frightened, had I not known him to be such a perfect actor. I told him that I could never meet him again and that all was at an end between us. I wish I had adhered to that resolution."

"I suppose he allured you with some assurance about the play?" I asked.

"Yes, he wrote me that his manager wished to meet me with reference to producing it. I went

to the place appointed. It was early in the evening, not later than eight o'clock. I left word at home that I would be dining with the Van Antwerps. I have already told you that I was not at all frank with my family, but I have been severely punished for what I considered an innocent deception."

"You took serious risks," I observed gravely.

"More serious than I could possibly anticipate," she conceded. "The manager was not there, and Mr. Fielding resumed his wild and foolish talk. He was in the midst of it when my father and brother-in-law suddenly broke in upon us and made a horrid scene. They refused to listen to my excuses and explanations, but took me home, where mother and sister Kit sided with them in their reproaches. The upshot of it all was that they thought I should marry Mr. Fielding."

"And he was villain enough to take advantage of the misapprehension," I cried, my blood boiling at the outrage.

"He not only took every possible advantage of

it; he denied my story about the play, declared it made up out of whole cloth, as a mere woman's excuse. No one believed me and I was helpless. I had no way to prove what I said and the story didn't sound true. It seemed much more probable that I had become infatuated, like so many other girls."

"But how did your father and brother-in-law happen to suspect you, and arrive so inopportunistically?" I queried.

"I have always believed Mr. Fielding responsible, but I never quite knew. He may have written them an anonymous letter, or something of that sort."

"Do you believe him still sincere, in spite of his villainy, or that mercenary considerations have come to be of chief influence with him?" I asked.

"I have offered him money, large sums of money, if that is what you mean," rejoined Beatrice, flushing a little. "I would give my whole fortune to avoid this hateful marriage; yes, and all that I may ever have in the future. But he still

insists that he loves me for myself, and for myself only. That is the part I fail to understand. How can love exist without honour?"

"Men will do desperate things under its impulse," I acknowledged. "I can almost appreciate how the fellow was tempted to the course he pursued, especially with his stage ideals and dramatic surroundings."

"I suppose that is the way he satisfies his conscience," mused Beatrice, "and his wretched scheme has been made possible by the blindness of my family and my own folly."

"Your people have certainly taken a wrong position. If I had my way the knave would be horsewhipped and sent about his business in short order," I cried.

"Then you—then I have, at least, convinced you?" And she looked me through and through with those clear brown eyes of hers.

"With whatever of sincerity and of worth there is in me," I said, with sufficient earnestness, as I ventured to take her little hand in mine and hold it. The glow in her cheeks was perceptible

even amid the rose-light of parting day about us, as I bent my face close to hers.

Man and woman do not come to an understanding by spoken words, always. Love often blooms from bud to full blown flower in an instant of silent sympathy. So it then was with us, nor could it well have been otherwise. In my view, while she remained Fielding's affianced bride, my own devotion to her ought to be displayed by deeds rather than in words, if I could hold myself in hand sufficiently. But I told her what I thought of the whole rascally business, and I didn't mince matters. On that score, at least, I was sufficiently explicit, and she had so long been misconstrued and misunderstood, by those whose pleasure it should have been to understand and protect her, that her face was fairly radiant with joy and gratitude.

"Then you don't think that I ought to marry him, now that you know all?" she whispered.

"Not much; not if I can help it," I declared.

"But I must pretend to marry him. You can see that, can't you?"

"I confess I am now more averse to that plan than ever," I replied.

But Beatrice was all for the mock marriage. For Fielding had responded to all her reproaches with the often repeated promise that he would make a clean breast of the whole story the very moment they were pronounced man and wife. She was attracted by the éclat of tricking her would-be husband into a confession which would clear her in the eyes of her incredulous family. I much preferred a less showy and less risky course. With the information I had and the inestimable advantage which the possession of her manuscript gave me, I was confident that I could take Apthorpe aside and, without disclosing my identity, show him the irrefragable proofs that his daughter had not been blameworthy. I was sure I could make him see that the actor was a lying scoundrel. With Carl Krull on the scene the following morning I did not doubt but that the case would be established conclusively in her favor.

If Apthorpe were once thoroughly convinced,

we could dispose of Fielding, and send him packing in short order. We could give Samuel Sears his walking-ticket at the same time. Personally that was the most pleasant part of the prospect. Sam bothered me. The little drama thus brought to a happy termination, we could then tell the whole story of the imposture, and send for the Rev. Charles W. Tupper.

It was a good plan, perfect in all its details, and Beatrice agreed to it, though not without strong reluctance even yet. Her heart was set upon the dramatic dénouement of a mock marriage; but she apparently yielded to my superior wisdom.

She was in the midst of explaining to me how she had met the young clergyman, and why she had sought to prevent his coming to Burgmoor, when the sound of voices and approaching footsteps warned us that we were in danger of being interrupted. For the supposed clergyman and the prospective bride to be discovered in a remote garden retreat whispering together in the twilight was far from desirable, especially when one



of the intruders happened to be the bridegroom. Such an event would ruin me in the eyes of the young lady's family and probably result in the complete triumph of Fielding, just when his defeat was imminent.

They were almost upon us before we noticed them, so absorbed had we been in one another and our mutual interests. Fielding was accompanied by his faithful best man, Sam Sears, and they also were deeply engaged in conference, or our fate would have been sealed then and there.

Beatrice was the first to take alarm. Before I had realized what was in the wind she had sprung to her feet and glided from the arbor into the path, where she accosted them gaily: "What do you men find to talk about that is so interesting you cannot see anybody?"

Fielding protested that he had been waiting all the evening for a chance to see her, and had just returned from a short drive to seek for her in the garden, where the gardener had told him he would find her. He begged her to take a

walk with him, saying: "I feel sure Mr. Sears will understand and excuse us."

"You are both most excusable," Sam assured them.

"Oh, I really couldn't think of it, the night before the wedding, it wouldn't be proper at all," said Beatrice with a light laugh, as she passed them and hurried toward the house.

Fielding muttered something under his breath. I fear that what he said wasn't very polite.



## CHAPTER XIV.

### PLOT AND SURPRISE

Miss Apthorpe had done her best to create a diversion in my favor, and evidently supposed she had given me ample opportunity to escape from the arbor. She had, perhaps, forgotten in her hurry and excitement that it backed up against a wall of moss-covered rock and was overspread with a tangle of grape-vines, leaving no possible exit save that which would bring me face to face with Fielding and Sam Sears. For once I was caught in a trap from which my ingenuity could devise no escape. I hoped she would accept Fielding's invitation for a stroll in the garden, and thus lead him from such unpleasant and dangerous proximity, but she was too much averse to his society to appreciate the importance of momentary complaisance.

I had barely time to slip under the rustic bench

upon which we had been seated, lying prone on my back, with the grape-leaves tickling my face, when Sears and the actor entered the arbor and seated themselves upon the bench under which I had taken refuge.

The situation was distressingly unpleasant. The slightest noise, an involuntary sneeze or cough, incautiously heavy breathing, even, would betray me, and I should be dragged from my place of concealment, and called upon for impossible explanations. Fielding would have me ejected from the premises, and Sam——! The very thought of his triumphant ridicule was intolerable. There was nothing for it but to wait, wait quietly, and take my chances. The leaves tickled until it became torture, while every perverse impulse of my nature demanded relief in a round “cachool!” But I managed to avert the calamity. Meanwhile the pair above me were saying things.

“That young clergyman played me a dirty trick with the bishop,” growled Fielding. “I would cheerfully lay violent hands on him, if I

could do it safely, and teach him a thing or two."

"Perhaps it can be arranged," urged Sears, gleefully. "I'd like to help you with the details. Do you think there would be time after the service?"

Sam wouldn't actually give me away; but, short of that, he was with the enemy. My score against Mr. Sears was becoming a long one.

"It wouldn't quite do," returned Fielding. "We couldn't afford any scandal, you know."

"Oh, there wouldn't be any fuss," said Samuel. "He wouldn't want any publication of the details. You know I said I would take care of them. We could lure him to a quiet spot and give him a little medicine. You are on your way to Europe, you know. He wouldn't follow you." And Samuel Sears chuckled inanely. He had in prospect my ultimate exposure, and was laying plans for the finale, which would be more picturesque were I duly castigated at the hands of the irate husband. Sam's sense of humor was somewhat grotesque, as I have already made apparent. To him it was all a jolly game, with visions of good

copy in the background. I would have given a handsome sum if I could have ventured to stick my penknife into his leg, just then, but I had to bide my time.

"I was just going to explain things to you, about Beatrice, you know," said Fielding. "You must have remarked her rather peculiar treatment of me?"

"She has been somewhat cool to you, and it made me wonder what was in the wind," acknowledged Sam. "There is nothing wrong about this business?" he added seriously.

"Nothing wrong when you understand how deeply and devotedly I love her," returned the actor impressively. "I have been obliged to employ a little artifice to manage her and to bring her family to my way of thinking—all's fair in love, you know."

"Trite but true," commented the facetious Sears.

"She was a bit stage-struck, you see," explained Fielding, "and was quite willing to meet me for little dinners about town, and the

like, but I could not bring her to the point of saying she would marry me; so I sent a letter to her father, unsigned, of course, saying that if he would go to a certain restaurant he would find his daughter dining privately with the actor, Fielding. The scene that followed was dramatic in the extreme—irate parent, tearful mother, vengeful brother-in-law, indignant protests from the young lady, and all the rest of it. I handled them all with kid gloves; and, as a result, the engagement was announced.”

His own conduct didn't seem so black the way he told the story, suppressing the all-important feature of the comedy she had written. Sam was his friend, liked and admired him, was even prone to find excuses for him. Fielding led him by the nose, as he did every one who fell under the glamour of his influence.

“It's a bit rough on the girl, isn't it?” was Sam's only protest.

“Not when you consider that the whole story is kept in the family, and that she would have been glad to marry me anyway, had she consid-

ered me her social equal," asserted Fielding.

"Then she still really cares for you at heart?" asked Sears.

"I am confident I have her love," declared the actor. "It's her pride I have to conquer. She is a spirited creature, but I shall see to it that she is a submissive wife. That is one result I have hoped to accomplish by this unpleasant but necessary artifice."

"It's a clever one," chuckled the jovial but unscrupulous Sam. "Like a play, isn't it? Wonder if she has confided her troubles to that young minister?"

"You don't think that possible?" cried Fielding in evident alarm.

"You never can tell. Women take to the clergy like ducks to water," philosophized Mr. Sears.

"Have you seen them together?" demanded Fielding.

"Not often, but he's a bad one, keep your eye on him," cautioned my fellow scribe.

"Have you anything definite against him?"



"Nothing, as yet, only he has a shifty way about him—can't look you square in the eye."

My account with Samuel was growing apace. It would take a lot of ingenuity on my part to even things up and I began to meditate cruel and unusual punishments. Sam hadn't actually betrayed me, to be sure, but he might do so sooner or later, if he took the notion. And, meantime, he had said enough to make my path precarious and ultimate exposure almost certain.

Presently Sears and Fielding arose from their seat, left the arbor and sauntered toward the house, while I emerged from my uncomfortable place of concealment to resume the enterprise in which I was engaged. I planned to go to my room at once and get the manuscript of the play. Hence I proposed to proceed to Mr. Apthorpe's study and lay before him the convincing proofs of his daughter's innocence and Fielding's guilt. I thought it wouldn't take many minutes to do this. With the stern and wrong-headed parent for an ally I thought that swift retribution would be visited on the actor and on Sam Sears. Yes,

particularly and individually on Mr. Sears. Of that I would undertake personal supervision, while leaving Fielding to more potent hands. Sam for me!

When I finally retired to my room for the night I had arranged with Beatrice to rap on the door which led from my room to hers, against which a dresser was standing. I was to rap once, if her father was convinced of her innocence, and twice if he required further proof. In the latter event she was to meet me in the garden at sunrise and prepare for any fresh contingency.

I sauntered slowly from the arbor, devising the best method of introducing the delicate subject to the girl's father, and then went to my room.

I put my hand into the bag. The play was not there!

A few minutes from the time when the course leading to safe anchorage lay plainly before us all our plans were knocked into a cocked hat and the clouds gathered darker than ever. The disappearance of the manuscript was a body-blow.

I churned around among the things in the bag and thrust my hand into its linings. I turned it upside down and shook its contents on the floor. The precious document had seemingly taken unto itself wings and flown away!

Then I began to rummage frantically about the room, poking under the bed and other furniture, opening drawers and shutting them, and creating a dreadful racket. Beatrice heard the rumpus and knocked timidly upon the door behind the dresser. "What is the matter?" she whispered.

"It is gone; some one has stolen it!" I exclaimed in dismay.

"Impossible; let me come in and look," returned that imprudent young lady.

Of course it was indiscreet, but we were fighting for her honour and happiness and had to take all chances, whatever might happen.

I moved the dresser, and she opened the door and came in. She blushed prettily. She knew well enough that it was quite improper for her to be in my room at half past nine in the evening, and that if discovered she would be in another

bad scrape. The all important thing, though, was to find that manuscript. We did not bother our heads much about anything else.

We searched high and low. We stripped the bed and turned over the mattress. We ransacked every place, possible and impossible. Then the ineludable truth became very evident. I had been robbed; the manuscript had been stolen! Sam Sears had been in the room and must have seen it lying in the open grip or on the bureau. At first blush it seemed highly probable that he had taken it, thinking to do a service for his friend Fielding.

Here, again, I was up a tree. The theory was untenable. Fielding had not taken Sears into his confidence about the play. If Sam had known all the facts he would never have sided with the actor at all. I had many proofs of his honor and good faith. He has no sense of propriety; he thinks many things smart that are not. But he wouldn't countenance a fellow like Fielding, if shown in his true colors.

But if Sears didn't do it, then Fielding must

have done it himself. There was no alternative. In either case it was clear that the actor must much more than suspect my disguise. He would never look for such a find among the possessions of the Rev. Charles W. Tupper.

Without the manuscript I had no case to present to Apthorpe. My story would sound quite as wild and improbable as that of Beatrice herself. Even Carl Krull could not help me, for he had never seen the authoress and did not know her name. Without the manuscript he would scarcely be able to identify the handwriting with that of Beatrice so positively as to carry conviction.

On the other hand, we were in momentary dread of the next move on the part of an intriguer so clever. He would doubtless have his trap ready to spring, to my confusion, before noon the next day.

Beatrice tried to put as cheerful a face on the matter as possible. She said to me that it was no use worrying and that it would all come out right; that I would save her somehow. At worst we

could await events and trust to luck. We would stand by our guns until the bitter end, anyhow, she assured me. She seemed to take a lot of comfort from my presence and smiled upon me cheerfully, appearing to think that I could work miracles. I told her to secure a good night's rest and be fresh for whatever might happen the next day.

She left me to my reflections, which were anything but rosy. I paced back and forth in the fruitless endeavor to see some way out of the snarl, which looked pretty dark to me. The mysterious theft upset me completely, dismayed and puzzled me to an extent I had not dared to confess to her. She had all the troubles she could well stand as it was. It was time some one took them off her shoulders.

At the very moment when I was feeling more depressed and downcast than I had at any time from the beginning of the adventure, I heard a loud laugh in the room next mine, on the side opposite to that occupied by Beatrice. I recognized the irritating, insensate risibility of Samuel Sears.

I felt sufficiently out of sorts, anyway, and that was the last straw. A man who would laugh like that all day long over nothing was fool enough to be a mere tool in the hands of a cunning rascal. What in the world was the fellow hooting about now, I wondered. Had he heard us hunting for the lost manuscript—was he laughing at our sad plight?

Then I heard his door open and shut. He had stepped out into the hall and was tiptoeing down the stairs. Where was he going? What deviltry was he up to? I considered it highly essential to find an answer to these questions. Sam Sears required close watching, or I might have cause to repent my lack of alertness.

I stole out after him and silently followed him down the staircase and out the front door, skulking like an Indian on the war-path.



## CHAPTER XV

### ON THE TRAIL

When we left the house and entered upon the vivid contrasts of deep shade and silver sheen created by the moonlight, Samuel Sears sauntered along as though he had not a care in the world. He appeared to be in no hurry, but glanced at his watch, yawned and strolled down to the front gate.

Henry, the gardener, had gone to bed. He didn't think the reporters he was looking for would play any pranks after ten o'clock at night. I dodged after Samuel, gliding from the shadow of one tree into that of another.

He went out into the road and down the hill toward the station. It looked very much like a secret rendezvous, and I followed closely. Suddenly he turned and walked back again. I was nearly caught napping, and had to jump into a clump of bramble-bushes and lie still with prick-



ers sticking into me all over until he had passed by.

I suffered for my sins in those few minutes. I hadn't scratched out both my eyes, like the man in "Mother Goose," but I had scratched out pretty nearly everything else. The dominie's frock-coat was beginning to look rather seedy. I accomplished one good thing, though; I tore a big rip in those elaborate trousers.

Sears walked up the driveway to the veranda-steps, looked at his watch once more and returned to the road, this time turning up hill toward the church. He was evidently early for his appointment and was killing time.

I could not be sure, however, that he was not doubling about to elude possible surveillance, and thought it best to keep him in sight. I shall not attempt to describe our wanderings in further detail. I followed him about for nearly an hour. He finally brought up at the gate in the rear of the garden and sat down to wait. Clearly this was his final destination, his place of rendezvous with his co-conspirator.

For whom was he waiting? Not for Fielding, surely, as he had just parted from him. But I was positive the meeting would throw some light on the purloined manuscript and the plans of my enemies for my downfall on the morrow. I listened intently, but could hear no sound of approaching footsteps.

Sam Sears now looked at his watch every minute or two. He was growing impatient; his confederate was sadly behind time. He had a note-book and pencil in hand, and he began to write. When I observed that, the truth dawned upon me.

I had been following him all over a ten-acre lot, getting torn by brambles, barking my shins and blistering my hands, and all the time my quarry was merely trying to kill time while waiting for me!

It was I who had the appointment with him at the rear garden-gate. I had promised to reveal to him the secrets of my prison-house, or any other ghost-story I could make him believe, or even half believe, with the aid of suavity and

moonshine. He was anticipating a tale which would supply him with copy for a big scarehead, and sat there, with faith in me that was really childlike, note-book all ready, awaiting my arrival.

Well, he would have to wait. When I promised to unfold my story I thought it would be easy enough to fill him up with a yarn that would look extremely well in print, even if it had but small foundation in fact. The trouble was I had been able to spare no time to invent it. If I could only have been preparing a tale for his ears instead of "playing Indian" there might have been a chance; but I had worked my machine for grinding out romances so hard that it refused to budge. The cogs slipped and failed to work.

While I was cudgeling my brains to concoct some scheme that would dispose of Samuel until after the wedding, I heard a gentle "hist" at my side. A form was gliding toward me through the shadows. It proved to be the Rev. Charles W. Tupper. The young clergyman seemed very much excited and intensely in earnest.

"Shall we creep upon him now and capture him while he is off his guard?" he asked in a whisper.

"On whom?" I returned in some astonishment.

Tupper pointed to Sam Sears. "Don't you see him? I thought you were watching him!" he said.

Then I understood. He had taken me seriously about getting Sears out of our way, and was fully prepared to play his part in the removal. Doubtless, as he had promised, he had thought up some scheme. He was a manly fellow, that young parson, and handy with his fists, as I had cause to remember. His interest in the adventure was thoroughly aroused, and he meant to see things through to a finish.

"What can we do with him, after we have got him?" I asked.

"I have found a fine prison," he returned with apparent seriousness. "There is a deserted house, half a mile up the road, and back of it is a small building where the former tenants used to keep their hens. I judge so, at least, by the number

of feathers about. It would be a safe place. No one would ever think of looking for him there, and he would come to no harm."

That seemed probable enough. Sam couldn't get into mischief in a deserted hen-roost, though I wouldn't vouch for him anywhere else. I began to get interested. The plan looked more feasible than I had at first thought, though there were still serious objections.

"How can we persuade him to stay there, after we have captured him and carried him off?" I queried. I wish to make it clear, both to Sam and to the public at large, that the dominie was the one who planned the whole thing, and that I merely acquiesced because I could see no other way open.

"Oh, I have been studying the thing out all the afternoon," whispered Tupper. "I hadn't anything else to do, and I knew you depended on me. I would do anything for her, and I have it all arranged down to the smallest detail. Of course you were not serious about the chloroform business; and, anyway, it's too risky."

"I also am enlisted in her cause to the death. What's the scheme?" said I.

"Well, we don't want to hurt him, or drug him, or anything like that. It would be wrong to tie him up tight and stop the circulation. He would suffer agonies before to-morrow noon, if we did that. I have been searching for clothes-line all the afternoon, and have collected twenty coils of it and piled them around the gate. He is sitting on some of it now. We won't pull it tight, but we will wind it about him until there is no possible chance of his breaking loose, and yet there will be no strain on him anywhere. We can make the pressure even all over, you see."

Poor, unsuspecting, trusting Samuel! He little guessed what fell designs were being entertained against him. That energetic parson had industriously gathered several hundred feet of rope and stored it in the vicinity. I hesitated. It was a drastic remedy, but Sam was sorely in the way. I had fully expected to find some means of packing him off after the bishop; but as I had failed to devise any fraud that would serve the

purpose, brute force seemed all that remained. Of course there were chances to take, but I had been doing that all day long.

Yet I did not like the idea; it lacked finesse. It was too easy and had no subtlety about it. It wasn't my way of doing things, and would never have occurred to me if it had not been for the parson. It was amusing to see how ardent he was in the nefarious business. He had nothing to do but plan that piece of deviltry; and, on the whole, he planned it well.

Well, I had promised to give Samuel Sears something to think about. I had agreed to give him material for a sensational article. I had no story to relate to him, so I'd have to enact one, I was in honor bound to do it. Of course he might not be in a position to write it up right away, but it would keep. Besides, he was likely to prove a troublesome customer if left at large. Clearly, it would be a good plan to render his ardent impulses inactive for a short period.

His subsequent account of his adventures in that hen-roost was a remarkable story; and he

didn't give me any credit for "putting him on," as it were, either.

The die was cast. The two of us stole upon that unsuspecting journalist like a couple of Indians.

There he was, actually sitting on several coils of the rope that was to be instrumental in his captivity. He was, perhaps, dreaming of his sweetheart, as he sat there in the moonlight, taking in the ozone as it was wafted from the pines of the hills. If ever the world seemed at peace to the contemplative soul of Samuel Sears it was then.

Suddenly he felt his hands pinioned behind him while a cloth was thrust rudely into his mouth. He has complained since that it wasn't a nice, clean napkin but an old dish-cloth the parson had found hanging on one of the clothes-lines. Sam is too particular; war is hell.

Of course he struggled like a madman, but he was taken by surprise and we were too many for him. After reducing him to submission we wound him up in the clothes-line. It took some time.



There was a lot of it around, and we didn't wish to waste any. When we had used up all Sam had been sitting on, I held our victim while the parson fetched another coil from its hiding-place. I had never before handled so much rope all at once in my life. We wound it carefully and symmetrically, so that the pressure would be perfectly even and not very tight anywhere. We were as careful of his comfort as we would have been of that of a new-born baby.

When we had finished Sam looked like a big ball of yarn, or a spool of wire. There was no danger of his catching cold, we were very careful about that. He could have stood many degrees below zero with the wraps we furnished him. We made him spherical, like the earth, just a little flattened at the poles.

We lifted him up between us, but it was about all we could stagger under. Part of the weight was Sam, but more if it was rope. We carried him about half a mile up the hill to the unoccupied house, and back to the hen-coop in the rear. It was a hard pull. I wanted to roll him

along in front of us, but the dominie wouldn't let me. "It might make him dizzy," he urged.

"He's a giddy youth, anyway; a little extra whirling about won't hurt him," I argued.

"But if he should slip, if we should have an accident, just think how far he'd roll!" protested the dominie.

"I'd like to see," said I, and we both turned our glances down the steep hill into the dim valley where the river ran three miles away and a thousand feet below.

Sam's feet wiggled. He couldn't join in the discussion and argue the point because of an artificial impediment in his speech, but he managed to display his emotions, just the same, by the frightful agitation of his feet—which goes to show what a short remove we are from the dumb animals. Stop our mouths and our other members begin to be expressive.

Just then we heard the sound of wheels rapidly approaching. A carriage was coming toward us down the road at a rapid pace and was almost upon us. We had to ditch Sam. There was no

help for it, and he bounded into the roadside gully like a rubber ball. We crouched behind some bushes and the vehicle passed us and disappeared down the hill, but we had a bad scare. So did Sam. He thought we had let him slip and that he had started in a three-mile journey down hill toward the river—so he said afterwards, anyhow.

Then we took up our burden and struggled on, reaching our destination after half an hour's hard labour. At the gate of the deserted farmhouse Tupper had placed a couple of lanterns which we lighted before taking Sam to his place of confinement. We needed them, for it was dark as pitch in the coop. It was a little stuffy in there and smelled some of chickens, but it was otherwise comfortable enough. There was plenty of straw on the floor and lots of soft, downy feathers. I think they must have plucked a whole flock of chickens in that coop at some time, or else dumped the contents of an old feather-bed on the floor. It was the featheriest place I was ever in.

It was important to determine whether Sam could be heard from the road, should he call for help, for we could not leave him gagged all night. So Tupper went out to the gate to listen while I removed the napkin from Sam's mouth. For a second or so he couldn't say anything. He merely gasped and spat out lint and such portions of the napkin as I had failed to extract.

When he was fully uncorked the language began to come out the way champagne spurts up from the mouth of a bottle when it is overwarm. That was Sam's trouble; he was too hot. If we could only have laid him away on ice there wouldn't have been so much said. When champagne is chilled a bit a lot of it stays in the bottle after the cork is drawn. It wasn't that way with Sam. When the stopper was removed all the words he had inside of him came out with a rush.



## CHAPTER XVI

### CAPTIVE

I was glad to be alone with Samuel Sears for a few minutes. I wanted to have a heart to heart talk with him, in the first place; and, secondly, what he said would have shocked the minister—it even shocked me a bit, his talk was so wild and bloodthirsty.

The first words were merely oaths of a type so varied and ornate that they would have qualified Sam to become a rear-admiral. The volley of hot shot was followed by grape and canister somewhat after this fashion: “Oh, you jackasses! Just wait—only wait—knaves! fools! impostors! scoundrels! swindlers—oh, I’ll get even with you before I die! Hounds! whelps! curs! dogs! (and I forget what other canine varieties) clowns! chumps! bally idiots! silly asses! Oh, you think you’re funny, don’t you?”

"Calm yourself, my dear fellow, calm yourself," I protested.

"I'll murder you for this, Basil Plympton, I'll have your heart's blood, just see if I don't," bawled Samuel, fairly beside himself with fury.

I saw that he was in a frame of mind more dangerous to himself than to me, but that he had not yet acquired the humble and contrite heart and meekness of spirit that I was endeavoring to cultivate in him, and in all others with whom I might come in contact while I wore the cloth. Besides, there were a number of things I wanted to say to him and I felt he must be rendered more amenable to reason before it would be worth my while to enter into serious conversation.

As he was starting upon a fresh tirade of abuse I gave him a push and set him rolling around the hen-coop on a little practice excursion. He whirled about and about, rapidly absorbing feathers, until he became an animated ball of them. This downy globule was meanwhile exclaiming: "Help, murder! fire! thieves! robbers! help! help!" But the voice was choked with wrath

and other things, and didn't prove effective.

I can't see why he should have been so unreasonable. I had merely changed his status. He wasn't a featherless biped any more—he was a whole world in himself, trying to find an orbit and revolve on an axis. It must be fun to try such an experiment. You can do lots of things and enjoy all sorts of novel and interesting experiences. The chief problem was to keep himself inclined at a proper angle to the plane of the ecliptic. He had to bear in mind that his head was the north pole and should always be kept at the top of the map.

This was his chief difficulty in his début in a "star" part. It would seem that even a planet has to take lessons in curves and functions. He undertook to circulate with his south pole up and his north pole down—hence the occasional choke in his voice and his difficulty in enunciating his sentiments clearly. All this was excellent practice. Why shouldn't he learn the business of being a sphere while he was at it?

It was at this juncture that the parson returned

and undertook to interfere. He said I was carrying things too far. I tried to explain that it was all for Sam's good, but he seemed to think I had some personal grudge to satisfy in spite of my most earnest disclaimer.

"This won't do," asserted Tupper.

"Could you hear him out by the gate?" I asked.

"Not a whisper, but that is all the more reason why we should be gentle in our treatment of him. We can't let him stay all night rolling around with his heels higher than his head. We will have to unwind some of the line."

"Don't do that," I expostulated. "He is a bit unbalanced just now, but with a little practice and self-control he will regain both his mental and his physical equilibrium."

But the parson wouldn't pay any attention to these well-meant suggestions. He rolled Sam gently into a corner and unwound enough of the line from the middle and upper hemisphere so that Sam's head tilted upwards, while the ungrateful and belligerent spheroid glared at us and tried to collect his scattered senses and realize what




had happened to him, anyhow. When he spoke again he was more civil. He had been whirled about until he was sick and dizzy, and he didn't want any more of that sort of medicine, so he endeavored to be more polite.

"Look here, Basil Plympton, and you other fellow, whoever you are," he cried, "what is the meaning of this infamous outrage, anyway?"

"We think you need rest, Samuel," I explained soothingly. "This is a sanitarium and we are all trying to help you and aid in your recovery."

"It's a blame-fool trick, but if you will unwind this stuff and let me go, I'll try and forgive you."

"It is the general opinion of your friends that it isn't safe for you to be at large," I declared. "You have the delusion that you have been turned into a planet and must learn how to revolve."

 "How long are you going to keep up this nonsense?"

"You don't like being a sphere, eh? Well, if I couldn't be a better one than you, I'd sell out. Come now, would you prefer being turned into

something else, say a poached egg or a Bismark herring?"

"Shut up, you miserable tree-toad!" raged our unreasonable patient.

"You see he has delusions," I said to the cleric. "How about a terrapin or a bald-headed eagle?"

"Don't goad him to madness," interposed the dominie. "He will injure himself if you keep it up much longer—have a stroke of apoplexy or something."

"Oh, you are worse than he, with your infernal hypocrisy," sneered Samuel. "You must be the real clergyman. Ah! I see! I know you, now, you knave, you are that rascal Tupper."

"All the more reason why you should be kept where you cannot disclose the fact," explained the dominie blandly.

"Yes, Sam, your interests and our own both require your temporary elimination from the scene of action," I added. "And so we have undertaken this little enchantment. You really should thank us. If I had nothing else to do I'd enjoy changing places with you."

"I wish you would, for about five minutes; I'd show you a thing or two," muttered Samuel with renewed ire. "Oh, you wait, you silly jay, won't I lay you out handsome!"

"I understand you had it all fixed for a little scene after the wedding-service in which I was to suffer humiliation. You wanted to arrange the details, Sam. Much obliged, but I had other views."

"You heard; you were spying on us!"

"You are not much of a conspirator, Sammy, but we can't afford to have you at large, until after the wedding is over, anyway."

My thrust had gone home, and Sam meditated in silence for a moment. He had got it through his head, at last, that there was method in our mad prank, and that we meant business in spite of our jocularities. Having reduced him to the proper frame of mind we thought it good time to leave him. I asked him if he had any messages for his mother, or anything like that, but receiving no intelligible reply Tupper and I left him to ruminate on his sins.

We walked back to the garden-gate and sat down for a quiet chat. I had secured permission from Beatrice to take Tupper fully into our confidence. I was much impressed by the young man's initiative in the evening's adventure, and I had already been convinced of his manliness and genuine worth in spite of the ludicrous part fate had compelled him to play. Besides, we needed his help. I laid the whole case before him and he reflected upon it for some time.

"That stolen manuscript is the key to the whole situation," he remarked. "You cannot afford to go ahead in the dark."

"That is obvious," I returned somewhat impatiently. I had said that same thing over to myself at least fifty times, and there I had stuck.

"Let us reason it out," he said. "When did you last see it?"

"Sam Sears was with me in my room, just before we went down to dinner. My grip was open and it was lying in it. That is the last I saw of it."

"What time was that?"

"About seven o'clock. They served dinner promptly at seven."

"What time was it when you first missed it?"

"It was about half past nine when I returned to my room and found it gone."

"When you went walking with the bishop where were Sears and Fielding?"

"They were on the veranda with all the rest of the family."

"I have had a young man watch the place for me and report all who enter or leave it. That is how I learned of the bishop's arrival this afternoon. Mr. and Mrs. Gosse, Sears and Fielding went for a drive at quarter of eight. They had just returned when I left the hotel at nine o'clock."

I whistled. The dominie had thrown a new light on the case. I told him that we had left the dinner-table shortly before eight. The actor had gone out on the veranda with us. I remembered that distinctly, and the drive was arranged almost immediately afterwards. Sears and Fielding had come into the garden directly upon their return,

after learning from the gardener that Beatrice Apthorpe was to be found there.

"That eliminates both Sears and Fielding," concluded the logical theologian, after we had thus compared notes. "They had no opportunity to take it from the time it was last seen to the time it was first missed. There seems but one other possible explanation. One of the servants may have taken it."

"Not likely."

"Nevertheless, it would be well to have Miss Apthorpe make careful but guarded inquiries tomorrow morning. If we could by any good fortune find that manuscript the desperate expedient of a mock marriage could be avoided."

That was clear enough, and I began to feel more at ease. The clergyman's review of the situation had demonstrated that the chances of Fielding's being directly implicated in the theft were small.

Having arrived at this conclusion we proceeded to lay our plans for the morrow. I considered it important to have Tupper on the ground ready

to step forward in any emergency that might arise. I could think of no place in which to conceal him more secure than my own room.

It would be hopeless to attempt to smuggle him into the Apthorpe residence on the morrow, with Henry on guard with his shot-gun. At that time of night, however, there was little danger.

I agreed to be up with the sun and to climb the hill to visit our captive in the hen-coop, to look after his comfort, give him food and water, and minister unto him generally. I shrank from the task, for I am a literary man and do not like to hear language used which might get into my head and unconsciously corrupt my style. We all have to make little sacrifices for others, however.

So the bogus parson and the genuine one stole into the Apthorpe residence like a couple of burglars. We made our way to my room, where we hastened to seek a few hours of slumber. It was a queer thing that we, who had exchanged sleeping-car berths the night before and became involved in a curious chain of adventures in con-

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sequence, should pass the next night as bedroom companions. We had begun the day as sworn enemies. We ended it as intimate friends.

"There is nothing like a vacation among these beautiful, restful Berkshire Hills to regenerate a man," I thought, as I drowsed off to sleep.

Of course it hadn't been as restful as it might have been, but that wasn't the fault of the hills. Something had occurred all the while, but it was a change, anyway.

Certain it is that I had already felt the benefit of it. Perhaps it was the pure air. Perhaps also it was the inspiring influence of the young woman who was beginning to monopolize my thoughts.

"Liking isn't computed by the clock; it is measured by heart-throbs," was my last conscious thought.





## CHAPTER XVII

### A CORNER IN CLOTHES-LINE

I was awake with the first glimmer of dawn and dressed with silent haste. It was to be a momentous day for me, and I had much to accomplish before other folk were astir. As I made my way cautiously down the hall I heard restless footsteps and the murmur of low voices from an apartment which I took to be that of the Apthorpes.

I was just passing by the door when I heard Mrs. Apthorpe say: "Are you never going to retire, James? You will worry yourself sick. It is already daylight and neither of us has slept a wink."

"God forgive me if I am doing wrong," returned her husband. "My girl's face haunts me whenever I try to close my eyes."

"Can nothing be done, even yet? Is there no

help for her? She detests the man so," pleaded the mother.

"We have been debating the matter all night," sighed Apthorpe, "and we always arrive at the inevitable conclusion. Our duty is clear and there is but one course open to us."

I was about to hurry on and leave them to their unhappy vigil, when Mrs. Apthorpe's next remark arrested my attention. "What are you going to do about the young clergyman?" she asked.

"Mr. Fielding seems determined that he shall not be permitted to perform the service," was the reply. "He says he has proof that the bishop was lured away by a hoax and that his friend, Mr. Sears, has other damaging evidence against the young man, which can be produced, if necessary, and which renders it highly improper for him to officiate."

I had been suffering some pangs of conscience about the way we had treated Samuel. They were now removed, and they have never troubled me since. I listened breathlessly as Apthorpe con-

tinued: "I do not enjoy being dictated to in this way by these underbred fellows, and personally I like Mr. Tupper."

"I am glad of that," said Mrs. Apthorpe (so was I). "I think him a very upright and spiritual young man. He should not be condemned unheard."

"That was the view I took of it, and I am glad you agree with me. I told Mr. Fielding last night that, unless Mr. Sears had something definite and substantial to allege, Mr. Tupper would officiate, or there would be no wedding at all."

"It rejoices my heart to think you were so firm," said his wife. "To my mind Mr. Tupper bears every mark of being one of the Lord's elect. They do not like him because he is so much above them, and they wish to hurt and humiliate him, knowing they have us in their power."

"The actor has gone as far as he dares," Apthorpe replied. "I think that silly, mischief-making fellow he brought up from New York with

him is responsible for this last piece of impudence."

"I wish they would both go away and never cross our path again, James; I am wretched." And Mrs. Aphthorpe sobbed.

"So am I, Emma, but I shall do my duty," declared her husband.

I don't believe in eavesdropping as a general practice, but here I was surely justified. I did not care to hear more and glided down the hall, leaving them to their sorrow. They were doing what they thought was right, and making every one near and dear to them wretched, themselves included—which is often the logical result of misguided rectitude.

It was more evident than ever that we had done well to place Samuel Sears hors de combat. I had had a narrow escape owing to him, as it was, and would unquestionably have been dismissed in disgrace as *persona non grata* to the bridegroom if it hadn't been for my spirituality and general godliness. I seemed to feel a halo grow-

ing about my head and wings sprouting from my shoulders.

However vengeful I might feel toward Mr. Sears, it was one of the obligations of my new-born saintship to forgive him and to provide him a breakfast. To get him one I should have to commit larceny, a course which I think I can defend theologically. Anyhow, I tiptoed down the back stairs with Christian motive and burglarious intent. My objective was the Apthorpe pantry. This I entered with such stealth that I almost stepped on a mouse.

While I was in the burglary business I wanted to do a good job, so I cut several slices of bread, spread it neatly with butter and sliced a cold tongue to supply several tempting sandwiches. Then I discovered a big custard pie, soft and well frosted. It was such a luscious pie I was convinced the cook intended it for the village constable, if there was such an official in Greenford. I hoped there wasn't. I did not care for his personal acquaintance just then. At any rate I was sure the pie would be to Sam's liking, so I took

it. Putting these eatables into a convenient basket, I went for a brisk walk among the hills, winding up at the untenanted farmhouse.

We had set a pole against the rickety door of the coop, and it was well we did so, for Sam had certainly made progress during the night. By dint of worming and squirming he had managed to work his arms through the great coil of rope which enveloped him, so that his hands and wrists stuck out on either side of the big ball of hemp and feathers, looking like the flippers of a white seal. He had also managed to work his legs out so that they projected half-way up to the knees. By rocking himself back and forth, with increasing momentum, he could now and then tip himself up on his pins, to waddle half a step and then roll over.

He was engaged in this interesting acrobatic performance, with a skill and perseverance that would have made his fortune in a dime museum as I entered just in time to view the roly-poly collapse which concluded the exhibition.

I clapped my hands and bade him a cheery good morning.

"For God's sake, Basil, let me loose. I'm nearly dead," gasped the prisoner.

"Don't get impatient, old fellow," I returned, "there are only a few hours more of captivity before you, and I have brought you a good breakfast."

"Breakfast? How do you suppose I can eat with my mouth, nose and throat full of nasty, dusty feathers? Oh, you will have to suffer the torments of hell before I get even with you, Basil Plympton!"

I wasn't to blame if he persisted in training for the circus instead of lying quietly in the comfortable corner where the dominie had placed him. His hair and beard were full of feathers and looked as if they had turned white over night. I tried to clean some of them off, but when I endeavored to work a few out of his nostrils he snapped at me like a cross dog. "Let me alone," he snarled, "you will have to let me out sooner or later, and when you do I'll half murder you. I'll

thrash you within an inch of your life, and then I'll sue you for abduction, assault, battery and false imprisonment."

"Why not throw in libel, slander and seduction?" I suggested. But I saw it was useless to endeavour to mollify him, so gave it up and made an honest effort to feed him the sandwiches. He ate a little, though mainly for the purpose of biting my fingers. He caught me twice, and the second time nearly took my fore-finger off at the first joint. That is the kind of return one is apt to get for trying to help the afflicted. I wasn't obliged to bring him food. I could just have left him alone until afternoon and then sent Henry up to liberate him, while I started for parts unknown.

But I wasn't going to stop trying to do him good just because he was mean and revengeful. I had learned a thing or two while I had been in the ministry. There are ways of making the wicked see the light by kindness and charity and moral suasion.

As I did not wish to lose any more fingers I



tried a new way of feeding him the pie. I set it down upon the floor of the hen-coop and took Sam by his equator. I tipped up his south pole and dipped his north pole well into the middle of the pie.

I hope he imbibed some of it. I am sure I wanted him to have plenty. If his whole north pole was abundantly plastered with bright yellow custard and nice white frosting I was not to blame. There was more custard in that pie than I ever saw in one of the sort before or since. It was deep, soft and abundant beyond measure.

Having given the captive his breakfast I drew water from the well in an old oaken bucket and gave him to drink. He took down about a gallon. I never saw a man so thirsty. Dust, feathers and oratory are apt to make one dry, to say nothing of the pie he had taken, inside and out. The difficulty was I couldn't see how there was room for all that water inside that coil of rope.

I was sorry for him, but he was too smart to be fooled and too dangerous to be left at large just then. Led astray by a clergyman, I had

reluctantly consented to his temporary captivity; but I was good to him and gave him all the pie and water he wanted. He claimed afterwards that I made a mistake about that pie and just mopped him around in it without giving him a chance to swallow any. I am real sorry. It was due to my total inexperience in handling an untamed spheroid that bites one's fingers.

As I couldn't do him any more good I left him, to resume my stroll over the hills.

Sam remained in the hen-coop practicing to become an acrobat until nearly noon, when he was liberated through a peculiar combination of circumstances that was entirely out of my reckoning. All this I myself didn't learn until later. But I'll satisfy the suspense of the reader, and tell him here.

If I had only known that the young parson had spent all Sunday afternoon appropriating all the visible clothes-line in the village of Greenford, I should have surmised that there would be a corner in clothes-line Monday morning in that enterprising town where all the villagers do up their

own laundry. As it had not occurred to me to ask the parson where or how he had obtained the rope I did not dream what a hornets'-nest he was going to stir up. When a clergyman once sets out to be a genuine, all-around desperado, he is apt to stop at nothing.

When Mrs. Smith started in to wash that morning she discovered that her clothes-line had mysteriously vanished, and sent her husband around to Mrs. Jones to borrow a few yards. Then Mrs. Jones found that her line had gone also, and Jones and Smith set out in quest of Robinson to see if he had any clothes-line; but the parson had been around to the Robinsons'. In point of fact, he had gathered all the rope in the neighbourhood, hence the throng of irate farmers and indignant housewives that assembled.

One enterprising laundress thought that she might find a line around the premises of the deserted James house. On making search she found Samuel Sears with all the clothes-line of the entire village in his possession or adjacent. She hailed the mob, and the indignant villagers rolled

Sam out. Then they unwound him. It was a long job, as they stopped to identify each coil and find its proper owner before they unwound the next. Finally they unrolled the last cord and Sam was free, but still very feathery and furiously angry. I shall always believe those feathers went to his brain, for he acted queer and light-headed for some time thereafter, as you'll see.

I do not know how he explained it to the farmers. They were inclined to make him out a thief at first, and as there was tar handy and the feathers were already laid on thick he might have had further unpleasant experiences.

Anyway, he was clever enough to convince them that he was not the guilty party, though the stolen property was found upon his person, and they were finally persuaded to let him go.

As soon as he was free to depart, Sam started in to make trouble for me. But that came later. Just now my lines were set in pleasant places, and fairer prospects beckoned.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### LOVE AMONG THE ROSES

It was still very early morning, and the sun's long beams quivered in the crisply cool air. I needed solitude and time to think—breathing space in which to reflect upon one of the greatest problems of my life. As Stevenson's Doctor Desprez has said, there is no time for making theories like the early morning. Of all the strange things that had happened to me in the course of twenty-four short hours, the most wild and wonderful was the fact that I had fallen deeply in love with Beatrice Apthorpe; and yet I had scarcely had a chance even to think about it.

One cannot reason much concerning such things. They are a part of the daily recurring miracle of human existence. But there was much to be considered when the one great fact of my

love was established and recognized. She was the affianced bride of another man, though she detested him and did not wish to wed him. The question was, were my lips sealed, or had I the right—and was it my duty—to speak? Should I wait until time had proved the quality of this new emotion, or should I acknowledge it at once for what I knew it to be—a thing of life, death, fate and eternity; and seize upon the golden opportunity while it presented itself?

These were the questions I was debating within myself as I sauntered down the road and entered the gardens of Burgmoor. The trouble was that all ordinary standards of honour and conventional rules of propriety were set at naught by the extraordinary and unusual situation in which I found myself. So I concluded to drift along under the guidance of my lucky star, and place myself unreservedly in the hands of destiny, as I wandered along the winding garden paths, humming the song of the Scotch plough-boy, dear to all lovers:

*"My love is like a red, red rose,  
That's newly sprung in June:  
My love is like the melody  
That's sweetly played in tune.  
As fair art thou, my bonny lass,  
So deep in love am I,  
And I will love thee still, my dear,  
Till a' the seas gang dry."*

Just then I caught sight of Beatrice wandering along a garden path. "There she comes with romance on her young eyelashes," I thought, my heart aglow with anticipation. We met. She seemed as sweet as the dewy morn itself, and as rosy. Now that there was some hope of escaping from her false position and the unpleasant alliance, some of the tense alertness seemed to be softened out of her face and she appeared more tender and more girlish. Was it this; or was it something within me that acquired higher perceptions as it matured? Both, probably. Anyway, the world seemed to be a mighty fine place to be in, just then, as we walked in the sunshine

among the flowers. I like to remember that morning.

A crisis was impending. Our fate hung in the balance by a very slender thread. To be sure, it always does that; but our threads were slenderer that day than they had ever been before!

She looked at me shyly, as I took her hand and pressed it. "Where have you been?" she asked. "I was worried about things and thought I might find you here."

I told her about Samuel Sears and explained that he would have to be liberated, if Tupper and I happened to be arrested or driven out of town, or anything, before the day was over—a result not at all improbable, all things considered.

She looked very grave, but I assured her that the deed had been necessary to the success of our plans, as Sam had warned me he would not permit me to conduct the ceremony. As it was, he might have said enough already to do the mischief; and we couldn't afford to have him at large.

"I am afraid he will murder you, or do something dreadful," she said.



"Oh, don't waste any thoughts on him; they are too precious," I protested.

"Don't," she cried, "that sort of thing reminds me of *him*."

"I am duly abashed; but may I never say anything sentimental?"

"I have had enough of it to last me all the rest of my life. What were you singing when I met you; something about a lady and a rose?"

"About *my* lady and *my* rose. You must know who she is and that I am all hers."

"Tell me about her," commanded the young lady demurely, but blushing radiantly.

We had reached the grape-arbor and had seated ourselves on the rustic bench once more. "I am quite unworthy of her," I whispered, "and she is altogether out of my reach, though not beyond my love."

"And why, sir?"

"Can't you see; can't you guess?"

"Has she friends, parents, wealth, refined surroundings, natural guardians and protectors, everything that should keep her from harm and

shield her from misfortune? Have all these failed her in her hour of need? Is her sole reliance upon your ability and devotion, and faith?" And she looked up into my eyes with such trust and affection I believed my love to be returned. I took her little warm hand and kissed it, then clasped it against my heart.

And thereupon an odd thing happened which brought me down from my seventh heaven of bliss with a dull, cold thud. She snatched her hand away almost rudely and looked at me with a most peculiar expression of suspicion and pique. I could not understand it. What had happened?

"Have I offended you?" I asked.

"Oh, not at all. It isn't what you might think in the least. I was glad to let you hold my hand. It isn't that. You will never understand and I can never explain; but how, oh, how can I ever trust you now!" And there were tears gathering in her eyes.

Was I demented; or was she suffering from nervous prostration?

"What is it?" I cried dumfounded. "How can

I have offended you, when I love you so deeply, and was trying to make you understand it? In the name of all that is good and true, what is this horrid thing that has come between us?"

"I suppose I am foolish," she faltered, "but it, it—it *felt* like a photograph!"

I gave a sigh of immense relief. When a man presses a girl's hand to his heart he ought to make sure there are no compromising things in his left breast pocket. If she happens to feel pasteboard instead of a palpitating organ it is apt to disappoint her and arouse her suspicion. "It was a photograph," I admitted.

"And one that you cherish so sentimentally, while you are saying such things to me? That is just what I thought! Oh, are all men like that? Shall I never meet one who is faithful and true?"

Well, I produced the picture. It was her own miniature, which, it will be remembered, I had purloined the morning previous.

"Oh!" she said. That was about all she could say—very well.

"I admit I did wrong," I sighed, "but I was so

taken with it that I couldn't resist the temptation."

But she had been ruffled, and was still rather coy. "It seems like a presumption, doesn't it?" she demanded.

"It was a presumption," I admitted, "but I am a very presuming fellow, or I wouldn't be here at all." Then I kissed the miniature and offered to return it.

She pushed it away shyly. "I thought you had better taste than that," she said.

"Better taste? How, how—what do you mean?" I stammered.

"Oh, never mind," she protested, blushing prettily, "keep the picture, if you like."

I saw that somehow I had blundered once more. She was beginning to be mollified, until I kissed the picture; that seemed to ruffle her again. She thought I should have better taste. Then our eyes met and in the depths of hers I saw a glow. My heart beat wildly as I bent over her face and kissed it, murmuring involuntarily, "I love you."

We were hedged in on all sides by the dark green grape-leaves and bright red roses, as I did it. How could I help it? Yet I wasn't as bold as I might have been for I was oppressed by the thought of all the fine and virtuous resolutions I was breaking, for I had not intended to do anything like that until Harry Fielding was finally disposed of. And yet I knew she returned my love, though she wouldn't say so, covering her emotion with baffling coquetry.

"You evidently haven't kissed many girls," she laughed, as red as the roses. "You are terribly unsophisticated. I like that; but still, a man of your knowledge of the world should be in better practice."

I tried it once more, my heart thumping against my side as if trying to break through. Yet I only touched her flushing cheek gently with my lips, both times. It seemed a sort of sacrilege, somehow, such was my regard for her. I had lost all my assurance because my very soul **was** filled with tenderness. She was right, **though**; I didn't know how the thing should be

done. No man does until a woman shows him how.

"I am sure of it," she whispered. "You have never kissed a girl before!"

I was on dangerous ground again. To admit the allegation was folly, to deny it was embarrassing. I did not like to be thought so amateurish, so I said: "Oh, yes, I have, lots of times."

"Then you shall never kiss me again, sir. When—when was it?"

"Oh, long ago, in the country; playing post-office, you know, and things like that."

"Oh, I thought so. Why, you dropped a kiss on my cheek almost as though it were a letter-box."

That is how she bewitched me, drove my scruples to the winds, and taught me the divine poetry of love. How roguish she looked, the very incarnation of tender mischief! The tenderness grew and the mischief gradually vanished, as I took her in my arms and pressed my lips to hers, whereupon she whispered in my ear so faintly I could hardly hear it: "I love you, too."

After a little we began to talk about the future. A good deal for both of us depended upon the events of the next few hours. She was worried about that mock marriage. She said it would not do for me to appear such a novice at that as I had at certain other things. At the very moment of triumph some awkward blunder on my part might arouse suspicion and spoil everything. She had dreamed about it, and when she awoke she felt worried. That was why she had risen so early to meet me in the garden. That was absolutely the only reason, she assured me.

I was a little shaky about that wedding-service myself. I admitted it frankly. It wasn't at all in my line. I'd rather preach half a dozen sermons.

"Well," she said, "practice makes perfect, as you know. (No, no, I didn't mean anything like that.) Could we have a dress-rehearsal?"

"Splendid, if it could be managed."

"That will be easy enough," she declared. "When you and Mr. Tupper are ready for it, knock on my door. I will have Mary and Ellen

in my room with me—the maids, you know, to act as witnesses.”

“They are in the secret? Is it wise to trust the servants in such an affair?”

“Oh, no, they know nothing as yet. But they love me devotedly, and will do anything I ask without question.”

“Well, what do you propose to do then?”

“Then you must remove the dresser, and we’ll open the door and come in. Mr. Tupper will show you how everything is to be done and act the part of bridegroom.”

“I do not like that.”

“Silly! You don’t suppose I would marry *him?*”

“With all the people you are going to practice on you might throw me in. Couldn’t I make one of a job lot of husbands?”

“Never. I could not marry you and have any pretense about it. (Will you never stop?)”

As I left the garden I felt as if I were walking on air.





## CHAPTER XIX

### THE VOICE OF AUTHORITY

I returned to my room and aroused Tupper. As soon as he was dressed he hunted up a pad of blank marriage-certificates from the recesses of his grip, and explained the simple details of filling them out. He was charmed with the notion of a dress-rehearsal; in fact, delighted with everything, now that he was on the inside and a main factor in the game.

I could see from the way he spoke that he also was badly smitten with Beatrice, and that the lingering hope of winning her had drawn him to Greenford in spite of himself and of her letter. That cleared up the one serious blemish I had found in him; and though we were rivals we had also become fast friends.

By half past eight we had set our room to rights and made ourselves presentable. Then,

as agreed, we rapped on the door of the adjoining room, occupied by Beatrice, and removed the dresser. There was a flutter in the next room and then Beatrice entered attired in a traveling-dress. The bare sight of that gown and the thought of the journey that it portended made me sick at heart.

If our plot failed she would be the victim of Fielding or an outcast from her home by the fiat of her sternly blind parents, with all the infamy of the scandal bearing her down. The terror of her possible fate pressed upon me for the first time. As I grew to love her more dearly, as I came more closely in touch with her sorrow, I saw the abyss that yawned between us with clearer eyes.

All the plans that we had concocted to thwart the designs of the cunning villain who was about to become her husband seemed puerile in comparison with the danger that threatened.

Of course Beatrice could refuse at the last moment to do her father's bidding. Of course she could leave the paternal roof and face the

world and the ever-pointed finger of ignominy. That is easy to say in print, and other girls have done it, but they seldom lead happy lives, and few young ladies of gentle and wealthy upbringing have the courage or the hardihood to endure it.

I feared that nothing I could do would shield her effectually. It was all well enough for me to kiss her in the garden and whisper words of tender love in her ear. But to give a girl like Beatrice the comforts and luxuries to which she was accustomed, even if she would marry me under such circumstances, would be a difficult undertaking with a powerful family like hers frowning upon me.

No, unless something intervened, unless our hoax, bizarre as was the scheme, should succeed, there was small hope. It certainly seemed probable that Beatrice would be the bride of Harry Fielding within a few short hours, unless he was tricked out of it, and he was not the man to be fooled easily with the warnings he had had and with so much at stake.

When she came in, followed by her two maids, we were all very solemn. I think that we felt that the critical moment was uncomfortably near and that we were, after all, but ill prepared to meet it.

Just as I took up the book and was about to begin reading the marriage-service, while Beatrice and Tupper stood hand in hand before me, with the two maids giggling in the background, there was a sharp rap on the door of my bedroom. Fortunately I had not begun to read the service. As it turned out it was more fortunate still that I didn't complete it.

We looked at one another in dismay, then Tupper and the maids stole silently after Beatrice into her room. I closed the door after them softly, slid the dresser into its place against it, and breathed more easily.

All this had taken time and meanwhile my visitor knocked again. Then I let him in. It was Harry Fielding.

I started guiltily as my eye met his, but he did not seem to notice my embarrassment. He had

been told by Sam Sears that I had a shifty way about me, and now was doubtless convinced of it.

"Good morning," he said pleasantly, "pardon my disturbing you, but a telegram addressed to you has just arrived from Boston. It was so bulky and the tariff so high I thought I would consult you before paying for it. The boy wants three dollars and seventy-five cents."

He looked at me curiously. I knew he was wondering what business a young parson could have that necessitated the luxury of such extended messages over the wires. I did my best to satisfy him.

"I am much obliged," I said. "My family have some important real estate transactions in Boston, and are probably consulting me in a matter of such financial importance that cost is no objection." The explanation was lame enough, but it served the purpose.

I went down with him, paid the messenger, and took the precious envelope in my hands. That was one of those slender threads of chance that sway our lives. Fielding was curious and sus-

picious, and thought that there was something wrong about me. He lacked all scruple, yet apparently it had never entered his head to pay for the telegram, open it and read it. Even a clever rascal will blunder occasionally, and be both less rascally and less clever than the occasion demands.

"Have you seen anything of my friend, Mr. Sears?" asked the actor. "He seems to have mysteriously disappeared. I went to his room, but his bed has not been disturbed; no one has seen him since he retired last evening."

"Strange," I said. "Isn't he one of those newspaper fellows?"

Fielding eyed me narrowly with those fierce black eyes of his. "Why do you say that?" he asked.

"Oh, I have occasionally seen him at public gatherings among the representatives of the press. I did not say anything about it yesterday for fear it might offend you and disturb the Ap-thorpes."

"That was clever of you," smiled the rascal,

showing his white teeth. "These good people are all right, but they are a little peculiar in such matters."

"So I judged."

"You seem a good sort, though my friend intimated that I would do well to keep an eye on you. These newspaper chaps have queer fancies and are apt to see a mare's nest in everything."

"It's their trade, you know," I commented. I was glad he had such a poor opinion of the acumen of my craft. I was also rejoiced to think I had given Samuel all the pie he wanted.

"I want to ask you a rather delicate question," said the actor, hesitating and looking somewhat embarrassed. He evidently felt the necessity of sounding me. Sears had failed him, and he could not persist in his refusal to accept me as the officiating clergyman without a disagreeable fuss with the Apthorpes and perhaps a delay that would be fatal to his hopes.

"You can rely on me entirely," I was diplomatic enough to assure him.

"You must have noticed, then," he found

courage to say, "that there is some slight estrangement between myself, and—and the young lady up-stairs. It is but a child's whim, however. Has she said anything to you about it?"

"She has intimated that she is not very eager about the marriage, but that her parents have insisted that she must keep faith. I tried to persuade her that it was too late to withdraw now; that no good could come of it in the end." I had to make myself solid with Fielding at the cost of verisimilitude.

"That's right," he returned heartily. "I see you understand what you were sent for and what you are expected to do. Do the right thing, and I will take care of you in a substantial fashion."

I bowed submissively and said: "I know on which side my bread is buttered. I have already been very generously treated."

Perhaps I overdid it a little. It may be that he caught the gleam in my eye before I brought myself to this apparently meek submission. I thought he eyed me rather suspiciously as I turned and went back to my room.



It was too late now for any dress-rehearsal before breakfast, but I moved the dresser once more and summoned Tupper and Beatrice to a council of war.

They were a badly scared lot. Fielding's sudden appearance had led them to believe his coming premeditated, and they had listened fearfully for the expected uproar below when I went down with him.

I told them not to worry, that all was going well, which hardly accorded with my real opinion. Then I informed them that I had just received a telegram from Boston lawyers of high repute, giving advice on the subject of mock marriages.

I opened and read the momentous missive while they listened with breathless attention. It ran as follows:

Boston, July 16, 1908.

"Rev. Charles W. Tupper,

Burgmoor, Greenford, Mass.

"Replying to your inquiry: Chapter 781, L. 1897, State of Massachusetts, reads as follows:

“Section I.—All duly ordained clergymen of every Christian denomination, all rabbis of synagogues, all justices of the peace, selectmen of towns, or any member of a body clothed by law with legislative powers, and all executive officials of the state, may solemnize marriages within this state.

“Section II.—Any marriage performed by any person not herein authorized, shall, on and after the passage of this act, be valid and binding upon the contracting parties, but such unauthorized person shall be guilty of a felony and subject to fine and imprisonment.

“Section III.—Nothing contained in the last section shall be made the foundation for any prosecution for bigamy. If one or both of said contracting parties are, at the time of said marriage by said unauthorized person, already married and have a lawful husband or wife still living, then, and in that event, said section shall be of no force or effect whatever.

“Section IV.—This act shall take effect immediately.”

While I read these formal words, Beatrice stood with puckered brow, endeavoring to comprehend the legal phraseology. Its intent was clear enough, however, and none of us could fail to understand it.

"What does it all mean," she asked, though her pale face showed that she must know.

"For one thing," I replied, "it means that if I had conducted that dress-rehearsal we started when Mr. Fielding interrupted us, you would now be Mrs. Charles W. Tupper, and I a candidate for state-prison, where several persons would be extremely glad to land me."

"You can't fool with the wedding-ceremony very much in these parts, can you?" said Tupper ruefully.

I could see that he was inwardly abusing his hard luck. He would have been willing enough that I should go to jail, provided that Beatrice thereby became his wife. I did not blame him much. Were the case reversed I might have felt just as he did.

"We could have procured a pardon from the

governor, or something," he added, thinking aloud.

"No, I thank you," I returned. "I am willing to be kind and obliging, and in some respects I like the ministry; but I do not care about going to jail."

"Not even for me?" ventured Beatrice.

"If it would do you any good I'd serve twenty years for you, my dear young lady. But I won't marry you to another fellow and go to prison myself, not for love or money."

"Of course not," she assented. "How fortunate that you sent to those lawyers for advice. I should have been the bride of three or four different men, all in one morning, if we had not been warned in time."

"Yes," I added, "and if we had omitted the dress-rehearsal, and I had married you downstairs to Mr. Fielding, as we first planned, we should be in a still worse fix. You could never set it aside on the ground of accident, or anything like that, as you could have done in my friend Tupper's case."

I shot that last suggestion at the dominie just for luck. I didn't want him to feel too bad about the chance he had missed.

"Yes, of course," said the girl, "a marriage by accident would not stand in the courts, so I should not have been compelled to remain Mrs. Tupper."

"Of course not," assented the clergyman, looking much crestfallen. He seemed really unhappy over it.

Then Beatrice was seized with one of those senseless fits of sympathy women have, and added, with a bright smile. "But I would rather have been Mrs. Tupper than Mrs. Fielding. So I might never have gone to law about it, after all."

"Really?" said the poor cleric, with a beatified grin.

I went over and kicked the dress-suit case. I kicked it clear to the other end of the room. I might have spared my energy, for the young lady laughed in the dominie's face. Then the breakfast bell sounded, and she hurried back into her

room. It was just as well she went. We were both getting foolish over her, and we needed all our wits and a united company.

Tupper and I looked at each other in blank dismay. Beatrice seemed strangely oblivious to the fact, but we were dished. There was no mistake about it this time. That monstrous statute left no loophole for us through which to crawl.

It was only when all seemed lost that I realized what hopes I had founded on the wild scheme of a mock marriage, into which ordinarily sensible men, like the young clergyman and myself, had been beguiled through the witcheries of the young lady and the misfortunes that threatened her.

As there was nothing else that could be done for the present, I went down to breakfast with a sore heart. Oh, if I could only have laid my hands on the stolen manuscript of that play!

We had arranged to have Mary and Ellen serve Tupper a meal in my room, where he was to remain concealed until we could rearrange our plans.

It began to look as if he would have to marry the girl to Fielding in the end. Certainly I wouldn't do it after reading that statute.

I felt pretty blue as I sat down to breakfast, but I was no more so than every one else at the table. As the time drew near the whole family were oppressed by the young girl's very apparent unhappiness. Fielding had tried to keep a bold front, but he could have felt very little joy in the success of his calculations.

Perhaps he, too, as the critical moment approached, began to have misgivings, and to wish that he had never descended to the dishonorable course which was to make Beatrice Apthorpe his unwilling bride. I hope so, anyway.

Beatrice was late, but when she came down she was radiant. She smiled upon every one and even bestowed a gracious nod upon her destined husband whom she had hitherto rather studiously ignored.

What had got into the girl! Had she been playing with me all along? No, I could not very well believe that, for when she looked at me her

eyes had a shine in them that I had never seen before.

I could not make it out, so gave up trying. A man who endeavors fully to comprehend any woman, even the simplest of her sex, has a job of large dimensions on his hands, and Beatrice Apthorpe possessed as complex a personality as any woman I had ever met.

After breakfast we all went out on the veranda. It was a very gloomy wedding-party.

Beatrice invited Fielding to walk with her in the garden. Was she going to make a last appeal for mercy, or did she intend to throw him off his guard?

I watched her as they walked, with jealous rage boiling in my heart. I noticed that she kept well in view all the time. There was no effort to draw the actor aside for a private conference. She laughed and chatted, and I could see Fielding smiling all over. How I wanted to choke him. *He* her husband!

For half an hour or more the bride and groom sauntered back and forth on the lawn before us



while we all sat and watched them. The girl was apparently resigned to her fate and endeavouring to make the best of it. Her relatives had done their duty as they saw it, but they were very dejected.

It was nearly eleven o'clock when the pair rejoined us. The wedding was to take place at quarter of twelve, and at quarter past that hour the carriage was to drive the couple to the depot.

Beatrice went up-stairs to finish her toilette. I hurried after her to my room, where Tupper was still cudgeling his brains for some expedient, without avail.

A quarter of an hour elapsed, and then Beatrice tapped on our door.



## CHAPTER XX

### WANTED: A HUSBAND

When Beatrice entered we were both silent with wonder, she had been transfigured with such startling loveliness. Ordinarily she was attractive and original rather than an aspiring beauty. There are moments when women out-shine themselves, and this morning she was radiant.

Tupper was dumfounded. He had never seen her like that before. I had—once, in the rose-garden that morning and as our glances met I felt inspired by her joy and confident hope.

Our eyes were exchanging rapid wireless telegrams of love and trust and mutual understanding. She was ready, then and there, to be my wife, if I would marry her—and I? My heart beat high with triumphant expectation. I was fully prepared to solve the whole problem by wedding her on the spot, if it could

only be brought to pass. But Tupper—how about Tupper? Would he consent to turn the proposed dress-rehearsal into a genuine ceremony? It seemed very unlikely unless he was urged into it by some clever ruse on our part. The young clergyman had aspirations in that direction himself, and would not surrender them without a desperate struggle. Perhaps it would be impossible to persuade him at all.

Our eyes had said all that? Wait until you yourself love and are beloved and are placed in a similarly desperate situation.

“Are you ready to perform the ceremony, Mr. Plympton?” she asked, with arch of eyebrow.

“I do not understand you,” I declared (though I had caught her play instantly). Tupper stared at us both in bewilderment.

“Don’t you see there is but one way open for me!” she explained for the clergyman’s benefit. “Before I go down-stairs I must be married to some one. That is what the law says. The marriage down-stairs won’t count at all, if I’m married already.”

"But," protested the amazed dominie, "you do not mean—"

"I am not married now, you wish to say?" rejoined Beatrice. "That is unfortunately true, to be sure. I certainly am not going to die an old maid, however. I have only fifteen minutes, but even in that short time I can find husbands to burn."

She looked at me so roguishly, she blushed so brilliantly, she was altogether so bewitching, that I was dazzled—and scared, too, for Tupper must scent what was in the wind. So I frowned and asked her what on earth she was talking about.

Tupper knew, or rather thought he knew; so, flushing to the roots of his fair hair, he seized her hand and sought to touch it with his lips. But she snatched it away laughing.

"Oh, no," she cried, "wait until we find out if you are to have the appointment. You know the latest smart fad among the girls is to have a list of husbands certified by the civil service commission. As you are not a veteran

of the Spanish-American War you are not entitled to any preference. Then, too, Mr. Plympton may refuse to unite us. In that case I shall have to select another candidate, as you could not very well be the bridegroom and the officiating clergyman at one and the same time."

"But, who else is there?" cried the enraptured and bewildered Tupper.

"Well," said Beatrice, counting on her fingers, "There is Henry, the gardener, that's one; and Alfred, the coachman, that's two; and François, the chef, that's three—and three is all the law allows. But they are all ready and within call."

"Nonsense," said the dominie, with a gay laugh. "The time is short, but if Mr. Plympton will act the part of a brave man, the law will declare you my wife, and no one shall take you from me."

"What do you take me for, Tupper?" I snorted. "Do you think that I would serve time in the penitentiary for the sake of making her your wife?"

"Can't you see there is no other course?" he urged. "We would manage to save you from any serious consequences."

"And will promise to bring you flowers and read to you while in prison," mockingly implored Beatrice.

"Thank you politely, both of you. I'll see myself in Jericho before I'll make you her husband, Tupper."

"How mean!" deplored Beatrice. "You see, Mr. Tupper, you will have to be the clergyman, and marry me to some one else. Now, Alfred, the coachman, is a veteran of the Spanish War, and the law gives a preference to veterans, but that should not apply in a case of this kind. François is younger than the coachman and not so fat as Henry the gardener; besides, he makes bully raspberry tarts. I nominate François. Ellen, go and fetch him."

"Don't stir from the room, Ellen," I cried, in affected wrath. "I never heard of such folly. Raspberry tarts, indeed! You make me sick—they would make you sick."

I won't permit you to marry the cook."

Tupper looked from one to the other in puzzled astonishment. He was still blind as to the climax up to which we were leading.

"Since you decline to make me Mrs. Tupper, and forbid me to marry François, or to eat his tarts, what do you say to Alfred, the coachman?"

"To the devil with Alfred, the coachman!" I cried with a melodramatic gesture.

"Then how about Henry, the gardener? He is a brave man, and muscular—as Mr. Tupper has reason to know." (Poor Tupper flushed scarlet at the recollection of his ejection from Burgmoor by the stalwart Henry, the day previous, and began to realize, at last, that his own hopes were vain.) "After all, Henry is not so fleshy as the man we had last spring," continued the merry young lady. "Besides, I could dose him with mamma's reduction-tablets, and he will become as thin as sister Kit, who nearly died of them."

"Now, look here," I cried, springing the coup

we had been preparing all the while, "if you do not stop this nonsense I'll—why, I'll marry you myself!"

"Indeed, I hadn't thought of that," she said; but her looks belied her words. The clergyman began to catch the drift of things, and looked much disconcerted and perplexed.

"The situation is very clear," I now explained. "This young lady requires a husband, and must be provided with one within seven minutes by the clock. I would be glad to accommodate you, Mr. Tupper, if I could do so safely, and it would do any good. But the insurmountable obstacle is that, in case of *two* unauthorized marriages, it is the second one and not the first that holds good."

"How do you know that?" he demanded, all hope vanishing at that announcement.

"I called up a lawyer by telephone, after breakfast," I prevaricated. "A recent decision settles the law that way." It's nice to be judge and jury and court of appeal, all rolled into one.



"Then I would not be her husband, after all, even if you should marry us?"

"Not if I also married her to Harry Fielding afterwards, which is an essential part of the program. Otherwise she would not wed either of us. She could take her time and find some one more worthy and acceptable, from a worldly point of view, at all events, than either you or I."

The poor young parson was nonplussed. It was a mean trick, but I had to do it. He would never have consented to make her Mrs. Plympton, if, by hook or by crook, there was any chance remaining of my making her Mrs. Tupper.

"Come," I said, taking Beatrice by the hand, and giving it a tender squeeze, to let her know what an earnest of love lay beneath my jesting demeanor, "I cannot make her your wife, but you can make her mine. Of course François is altogether out of the question. Therefore, there is no alternative. You must marry us, friend Tupper, and do it quickly."

"Yes, Mr. Tupper, there is no help for it," rejoined Beatrice, with that musical laugh of hers. "I would have been glad to marry you, if there was no other way out of it. That is out of the question, however, as you see. I thank you a thousand times, though, and I shall never forget your manliness and devoted courage throughout this trying ordeal. But I must marry some one immediately, and Mr. Plympton seems to be the handiest man I can secure, just at this moment. If François were only up-stairs, I might hesitate, but there is no time, now, even to send for him. Under the circumstances I can only repeat what Mr. Plympton has just said: Please marry us, and do it as quickly as you can."

It was rough on Tupper. He had the worst end of it all the way through.

He glanced keenly at both of us, and I think he could surmise, from the way we were looking at one another, that we did not at heart take the matter as lightly as we pretended. It is a way we have, this merry folly. We have it still.

At any rate, he rose to the occasion. There was nothing little or mean about that young clergyman. My laughing bride had not treated him right. She acknowledges that, now that she has grown more mature, and is sorry. But he was too noble-hearted to take any small man's revenge. He was about to open the book and begin reading the service, when we were all startled and alarmed by a knock on the door of Beatrice's room adjoining. Even a friendly interruption at this crisis would be fatal, we had cut the thing so fine.

"Can't I come in, sister?" Mrs. Gosse was calling. It was a natural and proper request—but most inconvenient. As Beatrice couldn't say she was particularly engaged getting married, I wondered what would happen.

She was equal to the emergency. Gliding to the door of her own apartment, she whispered tensely: "Kit, if you love me, get me some hairpins at once. Don't delay a moment, or I shall never be dressed in time."

The ruse was distinctly feminine. Sister

Kit scurried along the hall in a wild scramble for those necessities of coiffure which a woman always wants at the last moment and never can find when she is in a hurry. Could Tupper put the thing through while Mrs. Gosse was finding and returning with the hairpins? That was the all important question.

He began with due solemnity, seeming to me unnecessarily slow and unctuous, but he finally got to the crucial question:

"Wilt thou have this man to thy wedded husband—?" Before he could proceed further Mrs. Gosse called: "Here are the hairpins, dear—both shell and wire. Can't I come in and help?"

"Not now, Kit," whispered her sister, while reaching her hand through the opening as she set the door just ajar. "I'm in a dreadful state and shall go crazy if I try to talk to anyone while Mary and Ellen are fussing with me."

"Catherine, tell Beatrice to descend immediately," cried Apthorpe sternly, from the staircase.

"Just wait a moment, papa," returned the young lady who was in the process of being made my wife, while Mrs. Gosse hurried down to explain the alleged cause of delay to the impatient father and bridegroom. She did us a good turn, for they were beginning to smell a rat—not the kind used with hairpins, either.

Still at her post by the door, Beatrice called to us: "Yes, a thousand times yes," and Tupper thereupon pronounced us man and wife.

That wedding broke all records for despatch when the time occupied by the interruptions is deducted.



## CHAPTER XXI

### COMPLICATIONS

IF the secret marriage up-stairs was conducted with unseemly haste, amid frivolous merriment and interruptions that threatened at any moment to prevent its consummation, the ceremony that followed in the parlors below was sufficiently solemn and conventional, on the surface of things. And yet we one and all felt as though we were sitting on barrels of nitroglycerin, the while. The Apthorpes and Fielding were expecting some rebellious demonstration from Beatrice at the last moment. They thought that it would come before the supposed marriage was performed. We knew that the explosion would occur immediately after.

Apthorpe and Gosse were sad but stern, determined to do their duty, as they saw it. Mrs. Gosse and her mother were tearful, Fielding appropriately suave, Beatrice subdued and ap-

parently submissive, while I trembled with conflicting emotions as I opened the book and began to read the service. I was in a most peculiar and embarrassing position.

I think I may safely venture the assertion that I am the first husband who was ever in honor bound to officiate at a wedding, with his own wife and another man as the high contracting parties, within a few minutes after his own nuptials. It was the most unpleasant duty I ever performed, but I managed to put it through to a finish, though Master Howard Gosse eyed me all the time, in a way to make me tremble.

It was Fielding, himself who applied the match to the fuse and produced the fireworks we had all been looking for. The last words of the service had hardly been spoken when he sprang forward and attempted to seize Beatrice in his arms and kiss her. My blood boiled, but I endeavored to restrain myself, for I could see materials for the darkest tragedy in our little drama, if I didn't take care.

Beatrice nimbly eluded her supposed husband,

crying: "No, sir, you shall not even touch me until you fulfill your promise and tell the whole truth at once. I demand it as my just right."

Fielding shuffled uneasily, but braced himself up to the emergency, as he said: "I will keep my word, dearest. Mr. Apthorpe, I have a confession to make. All is fair in love and war, you know, and this is both affection and conflict. She would not have married me, and you good people would never have favoured my suit had I adopted ordinary tactics. My love is my best and my only excuse."

"What is all this, sir?" demanded Apthorpe, frowning with puzzled astonishment.

"Nothing much, only I must now admit what I have hitherto strenuously denied. The fact is there *was* a play, written by Mrs. Fielding, as she has always asserted. She and I met while I undertook to revise it for her. That accounts for her apparent indiscretions. It also explains my own infatuation. How could I come into such close contact with so much charm and loveliness and not be driven to distraction?"



"How, indeed!" sneered Gosse.

"She was so eager to have her play accepted and produced she thought of nothing else. I fear she was not so much in love with me as she was enamoured of the drama. But I am going to change all that. To do so will be my pride and my duty." And he once more sought to embrace Beatrice.

"Not now, not yet," she cried. "Papa, do you not understand at last? Will you not believe him, though you always refused to credit *me*?"

"It sounds plausible; I will try to believe it," said her father incredulously. He clearly thought the newly wedded pair were "putting up a job" to re-establish themselves in his good graces.

"It may be all right, but it looks rather fishy," observed Gosse.

"Beatrice couldn't write a play if she tried; I am glad to believe it isn't in her to do such a thing," sniffed her mother, who regarded dramatic literature and all things thereunto pertaining with a holy horror.

"But, papa, mamma, here is the play," cried Beatrice; and before my astonished eyes she produced the manuscript she must have taken from my room with her own fair hands. Yes, she had fooled me to the top of my bent. She says she will never do it again, but I have my misgivings.

While I was involuntarily detained in hiding under the garden bench by Sears and Fielding, the previous evening, she had possessed herself of the manuscript, and then capped the climax by coming in and helping me hunt for it. She was sorry to worry me, but determined to have her own way. When a woman says she will take your advice and be guided by it implicitly, she usually does so with some mental reservation.

This was the hour of her supreme triumph. For this she had watched and waited, schemed and prayed. With sparkling eyes she showed her father, mother and brother-in-law the work of her own pen and the interlineations in the hand of Fielding.

They were all puzzled and chagrined, but not

yet convinced. Apthorpe questioned the actor sharply. "How are we to know that you are not lying now, when you admit that you have lied to us hitherto," he demanded.

"Have you still got that anonymous letter which summoned you to your daughter's rescue?" he asked with calm assurance.

"Well, what of it?"

"I wrote it," declared Fielding, with his inimitable aplomb. "You have only to compare my handwriting there with my corrections of the play, or better still with a fresh specimen of my penmanship, with which I will furnish you right now."

So saying he sat down at the desk and wrote half a page while Apthorpe opened a private box and drew out the fatal missive through which he had been so terribly misled. A moment's glance at the three specimens of chirography was sufficient to demonstrate the truth of Fielding's assertions.

"Well, Beatrice," said her father sadly, "all this would have been quite pertinent half an

hour ago; but I do not see the use of it all now. As the wife of such a man as he has confessed himself to be, you must necessarily, in time, sink to his level, if you have not already done so."

"But, papa, is the fact of my innocence nothing to you?"

Apthorpe, like many professing Christians, was apt to be harsh in family matters. "No, my young lady," he said, sternly, "your imprudence led you to folly, and folly to ruin. With such evidence in your possession you need not have married the fellow, if you did not wish to do so. Having united yourself to him, you cannot complain if I am somewhat indifferent."

"But, papa, I am not married to him," she cried, springing her second coup with an air of triumph.

There was a general exclamation of astonishment, while Fielding glared at me and I returned the ill-will expressed in his eyes with compound interest.

"What do you mean by that, you silly child?" asked her father.

"Just what I say, I am not married to him at all. This man who performed the service is not a real minister, and the words we have said have no binding force or legal validity. He is not Mr. Tupper at all, but came here in disguise. He is Mr. Basil Plympton, a dramatic critic."

"And what is more," I interposed, "I am not a clergyman."

"What is this?" cried Fielding, in cold fury, "Do you think, sir, to impose on me? Even if what you say is true, it would make no difference. A marriage, even by an unauthorized person, is binding in this state, as I am advised by the best authority."

Did he think to crush us? Had he known of my disguise all along, while holding this trump card up his sleeve? He was a clever schemer and hard to match in cunning. It was more than likely that he had had his suspicions, but had preferred to let matters take their course, fearing that Beatrice might back out, thus luring her on to be caught in her own trap.

"Since you are so well advised, sir," I replied,

"you will be aware that such an unauthorized marriage is binding only in the event that the contracting parties are free to wed. If one of them is married already the statute does not apply."

"What do you mean to insinuate by that?" demanded the actor, turning pale.

"What are you both talking about?" queried the perplexed and astounded Apthorpe.

"All hands seem to have gone crazy," remarked Gosse with a forced laugh in which no one joined.

"Oh, dear, what are we coming to," bewailed Mrs. Apthorpe, as she began to cry hysterically.

"The explanation is simple enough," I answered with matter-of-fact coolness. "The lady was already my wife when I went through the farce of pretending to make her yours, Mr. Fielding. As she is Mrs. Basil Plympton she cannot become Mrs. Fielding, by any law of any state in the union until she is divorced from me. Your infamous conduct toward her has justified the deception."

"This is the most outrageous piece of impudence that was ever perpetrated," cried the actor. "If you dare repeat that falsehood, you rascal, I'll brain you!" And he seized upon the back of a chair with a dangerous expression in his black eyes. It was a mere stage trick, though well played. His melodramatic flourish served, however, to support his position, and it intensified the interest of his audience.

"None of that in my house," commanded Apthorpe, taking Fielding by the arm.

"I bow to your will, sir," said the big bluffer.

Beatrice had screamed and sprung between me and Fielding, when he threatened me. "Can't we all try to display a little patience and common sense?" she asked. "If you'll only listen, papa, I will prove to you clearly enough whose wife I am."

"So far as that is concerned, mademoiselle," returned her disgusted parent, "I do not very much care, so long as you are well off my hands."

"Mr. Tupper," cried Beatrice, preparing to play another trump card, "come down, Mr.

Tupper, and bring Mary and Ellen with you."

They had been waiting anxiously at the head of the stairs for some such summons, and now descended and marched into the room.

"Well, sir, who are you, and what are you doing in my house?" demanded Apthorpe, with a heavy frown.

"I am the Rev. Charles W. Tupper, sir," announced the young clergyman with becoming dignity.

"Tupper!" exclaimed Gosse. "Are there two Tupperes? All this looks like an outrageous conspiracy against us."

"Be quiet, John," interposed Apthorpe. "I fully appreciate the enormity of the case. Let's see what the fellow has to say for himself.—You claim to be a clergyman?"

"Certainly," asserted Tupper, flushing and becoming disconcerted by the smiles of incredulity on the faces of those he was seeking to impress with his newly restored identity.

"And what are you doing here?"

"I was persuaded by your daughter to assist



her in punishing a man who had wronged her, and in making her the wife of one whom she loved and wished to marry. I am sure that I have done what is right, and that you will acknowledge it when you know all the facts."

"Indeed? And why didn't you come to me about all this beforehand?" demanded Apthorpe sharply. His persistent incredulity was getting on Tupper's nerves. The clergyman was manly and courageous, but his want of status phased him. He became flustered, and began to look like a guilty man.

"Because," he stammered, after a fatal hesitation, "because you, sir, had been led to believe evil of your own child; and I wanted to help her establish her innocence and the guilt of this knave." He pointed his finger at Fielding, but his hand trembled and he never appeared to worse advantage. His manner had now become so bad that he aroused and confirmed suspicion instead of carrying conviction. He produced the certificate, and Mary and Ellen testified to the genuineness of their signatures, but they

tittered nervously the while, after the fashion of servants, which made matters all the worse.

Our case was now fully presented, but it didn't look right, even to me. It was all too fine-spun. There was too much plot and trickery about it.

Fielding was not slow to take advantage of the fact. He may have had serious misgivings, but his all was at stake and he played a bold man's part. "This is the most absurd performance I ever heard of!" he cried. "My wife, as you all know, has been acting very strangely of late. The whole affair has worried her, for which I am myself somewhat to blame. But she is so nervous and hysterical she has been victimized by these two designing rascals. This fellow who came in with the maids from the kitchen is the very chap you had kicked out of the premises yesterday by your gardener. He is a reporter sent up by a New York newspaper, and is capable of any unscrupulous knavery to intrude upon us and work up a sensation."

"He seems to have succeeded," put in Gosse. "Mr. Fielding is right. I remember seeing the fellow at church.—We will have you punished as you deserve for this untimely intrusion, sir!" he exclaimed, turning upon the now crestfallen Tupper.

"Out of this, you impudent dog, out of my house instantly!" stormed the enraged Apthorpe. But Tupper stood his ground manfully, and no one was on hand, just at that moment, who cared to enforce the command for his ejection. "I am here rightfully and lawfully, as you will soon admit," he asserted firmly.

"Come, I am going to endure this scene no longer, the carriage is waiting," cried Fielding triumphantly, as he seized the shrinking Beatrice by the arm. "You are mine now, and no one shall hinder me. Come at once and put an end to this disgraceful scene."

That was the last straw. I had been struggling to control myself, but could stand no more.

"You villain," I cried, seizing the rascal by the throat. "If ever you dare lay hands on my

wife again, I'll launch your miserable soul into eternity!"

I clutched his windpipe in a vicelike grip, until his face grew black and his eyes took on a glassy stare.



## CHAPTER XXII

### GENERAL DEMENTIA

I am glad they pulled me off and released Harry Fielding from my grasp before I choked him to death. I was myself astonished at my own savage impulse and insensate desire to take his life. These primeval passions lurk somewhere in all of us, I presume, but my particular devil had never before so taken possession of me. Fielding was shorter than I, but much heavier and broader of shoulder. Under ordinary conditions I was no match for him physically, yet for the moment he had been as a child in my hands.

But my sudden ebullition of fury had gone far to lose our case. Tupper was already thoroughly discredited, and I was now in much the same boat. With all the winning cards in our hands we were rapidly throwing away the game.

Apthorpe and Gosse had managed to separate us, after a short struggle during which the women shrieked for help. Several men servants entered the drawing-room just as the brief combat was over, and stood at the door waiting for orders, while all four of us stood glaring at one another and panting for breath.

"What a disgraceful exhibition!" exclaimed Mrs. Apthorpe. "And I thought him so spiritual and unworldly." I was forever fallen from her good graces, anyhow.

"I am going to send for the police," announced Mrs. Gosse.

"Don't do that, Kit," implored Beatrice. "Mr. Plympton is my husband, and nothing any one can say or do will alter the fact. Mr. Fielding brought the attack upon himself, and is fortunate to have escaped serious injury."

Gosse now collected his scattered faculties and took matters in hand. "This will never do," he said. "We can't have murderous violence here, and both of you should understand it and restrain yourselves. On the other

hand, *we* must keep our own heads level and look into this thing carefully, however little we may enjoy the task. We must not make the fatal mistake of sending Beatrice from the house with one man when she is, in fact, the wife of another. The question seems to be who this man is who has been masquerading here as a clergyman, and which one of the claimants the poor, silly child has actually married."

"That seems reasonable," I said. "It really sounds like sense. It is the first glimmering of rationality I have heard in this conglomeration of dementia."

Gosse was a business man, and he seemed to have the clearest head of any one in the party. I began to have hopes that he might manage to straighten out the muddle.

The broker eyed me keenly. "You are the center of the disturbance," he said. "In any event, *you* are utterly discredited. If you did, in fact, marry this girl secretly, as you claim, and then undertook to make her another man's wife, you are a cross between a villain and a

lunatic. If you did not in fact do these things, but, nevertheless, continue to assert that you did them, you are just plain lunatic. That is the only difference. We cannot well believe a word you say. Have you any further proof, aside from your bare assertion and that of those who are implicated with you in this wretched business?"

I glanced about me in desperation. I had never dreamed that it would be so difficult to make the plain truth appear rational. From beginning to end in this affair the truth was the last thing people seemed to want or were willing to accept.

Just as I was going to ask them to telegraph to some people who knew me, I caught sight of my friend, Carl Krull, striving to make his way up the drive in the face of Henry and a corps of gardeners armed with shotguns and prepared to shoot reporters on sight. At last I was to be indisputably identified, and claim my own!

"There is a man who knows me, and whose



word you cannot doubt!" I cried, pointing through the window to the picturesque group in the driveway.

"Why, that is Mr. Krull, my manager," said Fielding, suddenly turning pale and evidently giving up the game for lost. "He should not be kept out," he added, anxious to let himself down as easily as possible with Krull's help.

Apthorpe had heard of Krull—as who has not?—and forthwith sent word to Henry to call off his over-zealous dogs of war and admit the new arrival.

When there has been a nice, sweet family row, such as will occur now and then in the best regulated households, and a stranger suddenly rings the doorbell, it is refreshing to see how quickly peace is restored. The excited combatants stop calling one another names, and cease trying to scratch out eyes and pull hair. When the guest enters he is greeted by a smiling group of saints, all wearing wings and halos.

When the well-known theatrical manager entered, therefore, we all calmed down and

tried to behave as if there were nothing out of the ordinary going on.

When Carl came in he did not seem to notice me at all, a neglect I could not understand. He greeted the actor warmly and congratulated him effusively. Then Fielding presented Beatrice as his wife and the author of "Diamonds Lead, but Hearts are Trumps."

The young lady thought it best to make no disclaimer but to wait until Carl saw and recognized me. We both wondered what had got into him, anyway.

Then Carl said a few things to Beatrice which much astonished her sedate and prosaic family, as well as surprising Fielding and putting me in a seventh heaven of joy. That stolid German took up the manuscript which had been at the bottom of so many adventures and expatiated on its merits, predicting that it would be the comedy sensation of the year.

The Aphorpes were impressed. They were not enthusiastic in their approval of matters theatrical, but when Carl Krull praised a play

and stood ready to produce it, the fortunate dramatist was already on the footsteps of the Hall of Fame.

Carl did that much good, anyhow. But he soon made a sad mess of things and mixed us all up worse than we had been before his arrival.

"By the way, Mr. Krull," said Gosse, when the excitement over the début of Beatrice as a successful playwright had somewhat subsided, "can you tell us who this gentleman is?" As he spoke he pointed to me. "He says that he knows you and asserts that we are mistaken as to his identity.

"Oh, yes, I know him well," replied the dramatic manager gravely, looking directly at me for the first time since he had entered.

"Will you kindly tell us who he is?" asked Gosse, with well-affected nonchalance.

"Certainly. He is the Rev. Charles W. Tupper of St. Luke's rectory, New York City. I have known him for years."

My rising hopes were blasted by this utterly

unexpected assertion. "Why, you chuckle-headed Dutchman!" I roared.

"Have you noticed anything peculiar about him? Is he quite 'right'?" asked Gosse anxiously.

"He does queer things sometimes," admitted Carl, with an exasperating grin.

"What do you mean by this foolishness, Carl," I cried in sore dismay. "Can't you see that I want to be recognized—that I must be identified? Tell them at once that I am Basil Plympton, the dramatic critic, and be quick about it."

"But your telegram?"

"Oh, bother the telegram!"

"You said no matter what you said."

"And that's what I say now, no matter what I said then. Can't you see for yourself that everything is changed?" That nuisance of a telegram! I had forgotten all about it. I seemed to be deeper in the toils than ever.

"Stop tampering with the witness," sneered Fielding, taking courage once more after he had lost all hope.

"On second thoughts," began the perplexed Carl, running his hand through his hair, and wondering how he could satisfy my varying demands without branding himself before the assembled company of respectable people as a liar.

"Well, what are the second thoughts?" I urged, determined to bring him right up to the mark.

He combed his hair until his head must have become sore. At last he worked an idea into it. His face brightened. "I should have added," he said, "that my reverend young friend sometimes writes for the press under an assumed name. He is known among newspaper men as Mr. Basil Plympton."

"You idiot!" I cried, fairly beside myself. "Why must you try to invent things all by yourself? I didn't telegraph you anything like that!"

"The case seems to be going against you, sir," said Gosse. "It now turns out that you are both Plympton and Tupper!"

"Then who am I? Won't somebody please

tell me that?" cried the poor young clergyman, wondering whether he was going to be allowed to remain on earth at all.

"You?" snapped Apthorpe. "You are an interloper. No one cares who you are, anyway."

Tupper, looking like a ruined community, crawled back into his shell, sorry that he had ventured to say a word for himself.

"Papa," urged Beatrice, "can't you see that Mr. Plympton telegraphed Mr. Krull not to recognize him when he came here, but to address him as Mr. Tupper? Mr. Krull did not understand that things had changed and that Mr. Plympton now wants to be identified."

"Beatrice, I do not wish to hear another word from you," declared her angry parent. "How any sane girl could be willing to involve her whole family in such a disgraceful mess I cannot for the life of me see."

"Nobody seems to know who anybody is," observed Mrs. Apthorpe with a sniff.

"Come, Carl, speak up like a man and confess that I telegraphed you," I demanded.

"That's right, he telegraphed me," exclaimed poor Carl, turning red and looking very sheepish.

"The fellow is a hypnotist," laughed the actor impudently. "He has bewitched us all."

"I believe you are right," said Gosse, giving up his manful effort to unravel the snarl, and becoming as befuddled as all the rest of the group.

Fielding now came forward once more to insist that he must end the scene by bearing his wife away from this turmoil. I begged Carl to interfere. I knew he could control the actor by a word. I told him Beatrice had already become my wife by a secret marriage before I married her to Fielding. I explained rapidly and with gusto. I told him that if he ever had any friendship for me now was the time to show it. I tried in every way to convince him as to the righteousness of our cause and the iniquity of Fielding's.

I succeeded in convincing Carl that I was clean out of my head and a raving maniac.

He was not slow to announce his conviction.

●

He said all my friends had noticed that I had been breaking down with overwork, and that I was to be pitied rather than blamed for my queer delusions and strange conduct.

"I sent for him to come and see me at Hilltown in order to get him away from New York," said Krull. "He telegraphed me from New York on Saturday that he was going to leave on the midnight train. Instead of coming to me he came here, where he pretends to have married a girl whom he has just made the bride of my good friend Mr. Fielding. I think the case is clear."

"His vicious attack on me, which was entirely unprovoked, shows that it is not safe for him to be at large," said Fielding, showing Carl the marks of my fingers on his throat. "Poor fellow, I'm sorry for him, now that I understand, and I assure you, Mr. Krull, I bear no malice. But such a raving lunatic should not be permitted to deprive me of my wife, even if she is possessed with a perverse fancy and wishes to set her marriage at naught."

"I believe you are right, after all," said Ap-



thorpe. "Here, two or three of you men, take these fellows out to the stable and lock them up in the boiler-room until we can summon the police and turn them over to the village authorities."

Half a dozen stalwart serving-men, who had been anticipating some such command, sprang forward eagerly, seized upon Tupper and myself and began to drag us away. Everything had gone wrong and become topsy-turvy.

Beatrice, who had born up, until now, confident in the ultimate triumph of our cause, broke down with heart-rending sobs: "Papa, papa," she wailed, "how can you be so cruel and so obstinately blind?"

Just as we were being hustled from the room, in spite of our struggles and protests—for I began to lay about me like the madman I was supposed to be—our exit was delayed by an uproar without, that rose above the confusion within.

The men who held us stopped to look and listen as cries of "Stop, thief! Help!" and the like resounded.

As we could not very well be placed in any worse position than we were in already, almost any diversion must necessarily work in our favour. I began to hope that something was about to occur that would turn the tide our way. But a glance out of the window, and I gave myself over to utter despair!



## CHAPTER XXIII

### BOOMERANG

The uproar grew nearer and nearer, and some one rushed up the steps of the veranda, leaving a mob hooting without, and dashed in among us.

If we all seemed more or less out of our heads, the person who thus rudely broke in upon our unhappy and disunited company was clearly just escaped from a madhouse.

His face was covered with a yellow paste which glued his hair and beard into a weird coiffure. The paste had been mixed with feathers. The madman was covered with them. I felt like saying, "Soft you now, the fair Ophelia!" But I didn't dare. I did not want any more mistaken identities around, or to confuse things in any way.

But I was lost, utterly lost, nevertheless. It was Samuel Sears! Were my troubles never to stop accumulating?

Mrs. Apthorpe was the first to address the poor creature who had thus thrown himself into the midst of us, and now stood glaring about him in a bewildered fashion. "Why, Mr. Sears," she cried, "what has happened to you?"

"Where have you been, Sam?" asked Fielding brusquely, not at all pleased with the inexplicable appearance and demeanour of his friend and associate.

"How came you in this plight?" queried Gosse, with a grim smile of wonderment.

"Has any one been trying to murder you?" demanded Mr. Apthorpe.

Samuel Sears paid no attention to these pertinent questions, for he had suddenly perceived me standing behind one of the serving-men and not unwilling to escape his observation.

Samuel assumed the center of the stage, folded his arms and frowned upon me until his pasty eyebrows met over his nose as he glared at me with the air of an avenger who wants blood.

If he had been costumed for the part he would

have been more impressive. The pie and the feathers detracted from his solemnity.

"You see that man!" he shouted, pointing his finger at me and trembling with rage.

"Well?" they all cried expectantly.

"Arrest him. He is a thief, a robber, an impostor! He has entered this home secretly, and in blasphemous disguise, the better to accomplish his wicked designs. Oh, I'll show you up, you damn' fool! Just see me do it!"

"We know all these things you are saying about him," said Apthorpe grimly. "But who is he?"

"Who is he?" asked Gosse.

"Who is he?" demanded every one breathlessly.

"He is a rascally humbugger! He imposed on the bishop, he cheated the wardens, he fooled Mr. Dobbs, he deceived everybody. He blasphemed in the church and desecrated its altar. He betrayed me, his friend, wound me up in stolen clothes-line, imprisoned me in a hen-coop, and drowned me in custard pie! He is a knave,

a thief, a liar, a swindler, a hypnotist, a rogue, a——!"

"Hold on!" cried Apthorpe, interrupting this interesting catalogue of my high crimes and misdemeanours, "We know all these things already. Just tell us *who he is*; that is the question."

"That I will," exclaimed Sam, with vengeful eye and triumphant mien. "He is not the Rev. Charles W. Tupper, or the reverend anything else. He is that impudent and sacrilegious impostor, Basil Plympton of the New York 'Express'!"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Gosse, suddenly becoming intensely interested, "And can you tell us who this fellow may be?" he said, pointing to Tupper.

"Certainly," cried Samuel with vengeful glee. "Arrest him, too!"

"Why? What has he done?" cried Apthorpe, awaking to the significance of these virulent accusations.

"He is in the plot up to his neck. He is

Tupper, the genuine and only Tupper, the Rev. Charles W. Tupper, of St. Luke's rectory, New York City, and a disgrace to his cloth. He kept in hiding while Basil Plympton fooled everybody, and lent him his clothes and his sermon so that the deception could be practised successfully. Oh, you fellows thought you were smart to roll me up in a ball of rope and half strangle and smother me! It was great sport, wasn't it? But my time has come and I am on top now. I will have you both in jail before night, see if I don't, and all these good people will back me up and appear to testify against you!" And Sam fairly bubbled over with the triumphant expectation of our downfall and utter disgrace. It was nuts to him.

"This is clear and convincing testimony from a witness somewhat biased against the gentlemen he accuses," announced Gosse, suddenly illuminated by a dawning comprehension of the true state of the case. "One thing more, Mr. Sears," he continued. "You say that you have been outrageously ill-treated by Mr. Tupper

and Mr. Plympton—that they tied you up with rope and imprisoned you in a—a hen-coop, do I understand?”

“And mopped me around in nasty, sticky, mushy pie—don’t forget that,” urged Samuel, without the faintest inkling of the effect he was producing upon his audience.

“No, we will not forget,” rejoined Gosse with apparent sympathy. “But why did they do it? How do you explain their remarkable conduct?”

“They were afraid I would give them away. They had conspired to cheat my friend Fielding and prevent his marriage by having the ceremony performed by the bogus parson instead of the real one, and they knew I wouldn’t stand for it!—There, I’ve fixed you now, you fellows!”

While Gosse had thus been examining the volunteer witness, Fielding had been frowning and shaking his head and vainly trying to catch the eye of Samuel Sears, but now he broke out with: “You infernal fool! you! You are the biggest faker of them all, and in league with them from the very beginning.”



It was Fielding's last card, but Sam trumped his ace with: "Why, Harry, how can you be so unjust? Do I look as though I had been in league with anybody, or had any friends anyway?"

Gosse now crossed the room and took me by the hand, saying: "I suppose, sir, we have much to thank you for and many apologies to make, but you must admit that things did look black against you for a time."

"What is he saying?" asked the astonished Sears.

"You unspeakable idiot, you have ruined me!" snarled Fielding. "Get out of this before they give you what you deserve."

Beatrice, who had given herself up to despair and had been weeping hysterically on her sister's shoulder now looked up, smiling through her tears, to say: "I told you the truth, papa, from the very first, but you would not believe me."

Apthorpe rubbed his forehead thoughtfully.

"She is right, James," cried his wife with conviction.

"Of course she is," declared her sister.

"It is beginning to dawn upon me that I have been duped and misled into doing a gross injustice to my child," said Apthorpe slowly. "It is a hard thing for me to admit, but I can fail to see the truth no longer.

"Mr. Fielding, I always knew that you were an ill-bred upstart, but I was led to believe, through the dishonourable artifice to which you have confessed, that you had bewitched my child and taken advantage of her youth and inexperience to compromise her. The law of God forbids me to take vengeance into my own hands and chastise you personally, but do not tempt me too far. Take yourself out of my sight or my natural passions will overthrow my self-control and I shall do you violence. Go!"

Harry Fielding had played his game boldly and well, for high stakes, and had walked through the snares of his opponents like cobwebs, only to have his house of cards demolished by the indiscretion of his most zealous friend. Was it the irony of fate or the guiding hand of

providence? He turned on his heel without a word, and left the room with bowed head, pausing only to give one last despairing glance upon the woman he had so nearly won and lost so utterly.

Samuel Sears still stood in the center of the room, glancing from one to another of us in speechless wrath and amazement. The outcome of events passed his comprehension.

"Aren't you going to do anything to him?" he demanded at length, nodding toward me.

"The poor fellow doesn't understand yet!" exclaimed Beatrice. And she indulged in one of her musical laughs, that broke the tension all around.

First Gosse joined in her mirth, then Tupper and Carl Krull. Then Mrs. Apthorpe uttered a suppressed titter which set her daughter Catherine into spasms of uncontrollable merriment. Master Howard Gosse gazed from his mother's side. The contagion even affected the stern and unbending Apthorpe, who gave an audible chuckle, which set the servants off into an uproarious chorus.

Sears glared from one to another, and then he shook his fist at me, crying: "This is all your doing, but I'll get even with you, if it takes years!" With that he stalked out of the room and down the driveway, probably intending to join his friend Fielding.

He had done his utmost to avenge himself for his fancied wrongs and to punish me; but he had actually proved my guardian angel in disguise.

Now that I can look back upon the events of that somewhat emotional hour with some degree of calmness I do not much wonder that those matter-of-fact people were confused and bewildered by the surprises we tried to spring on them all at once.

If we could only have developed things more artistically and taken more time for it, they wouldn't have been so mixed up. We expected them to comprehend and grasp in an eye-wink a dozen or more happenings they had never dreamed possible.

They had to learn that Beatrice was an

authoress and to look over her play. They had to understand that Fielding was an odd and original genius at rascality, and had tricked them all into bringing about this marriage. They had to comprehend that I wasn't a parson, that Tupper wasn't a newspaper man, that we had swapped identities, that the wedding they had all witnessed wasn't a wedding at all, that Beatrice was not the actor's wife, though they had just seen her married to him, and that she was my wife, although I had just undertaken to marry her to another man.

Now that this was all explained and understood there were kisses and tears and general congratulations and felicitations, as we rehearsed the story of our adventures and misadventures and cleared up the few points that still remained obscure.

We all stayed to luncheon at the Apthorpes' hospitable board, and the real, true and only Rev. Charles W. Tupper held his due and proper place in the seat of honor and asked the blessing upon us with fervent reverence.

Not long afterwards my bride and I said a general farewell and were driven to the train in the same carriage which had awaited Beatrice when she was about to become the wife of Henry Fielding.

As Alfred, the coachman, whipped up his horses I wondered what he would say if he were told that he had occupied a conspicuous place on my wife's civil-service list of husbands!

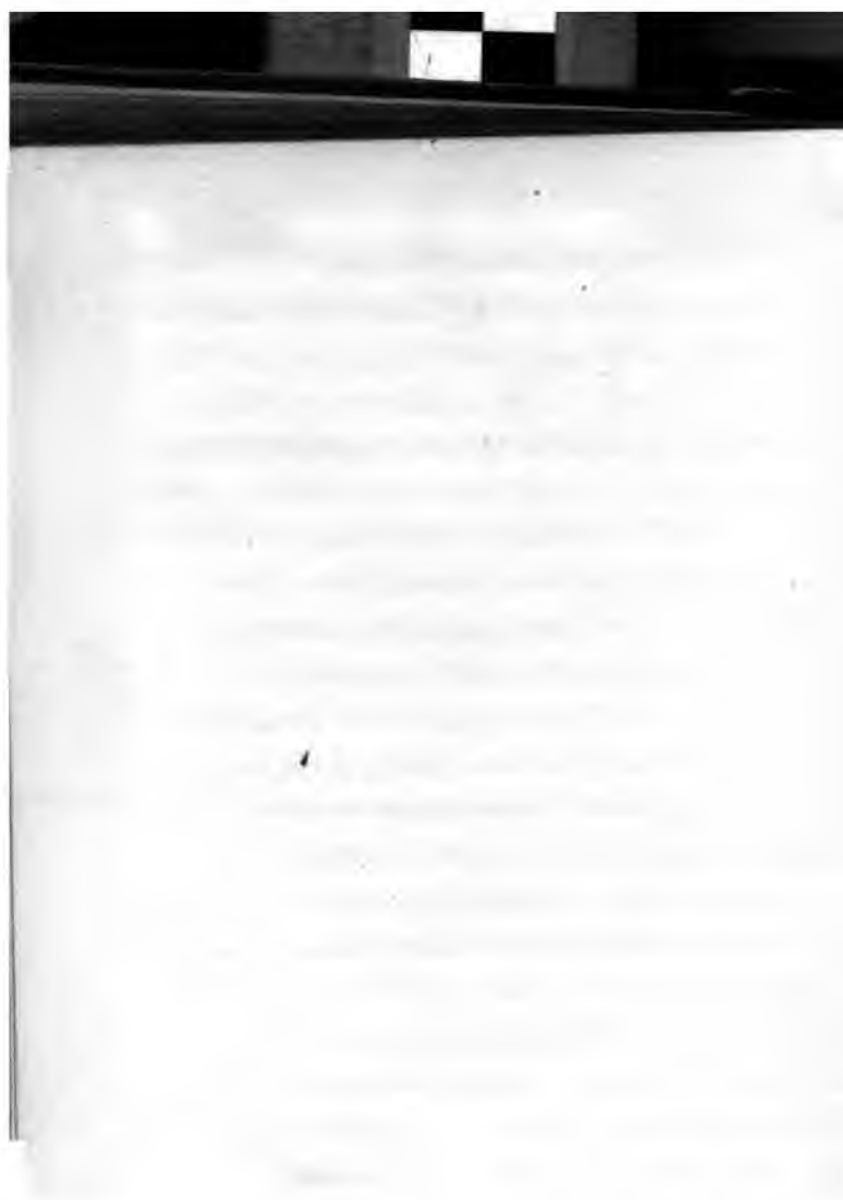
We concluded not to pass our honeymoon in the Berkshires; they were too lively for us. We found things much more quiet in New York. Nevertheless, I had a restful vacation.

A month later I chanced to meet Sam Sears and asked him home to dine at our modest apartment. To my great joy he shook my extended hand and accepted the invitation.

But Beatrice was much disturbed when we arrived together. Taking me aside she whispered: "How could you? Didn't you know that we haven't a thing for dessert but custard pie!"

THE END.

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